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Why He Earns $30,000 a Year

By VICTOR JONES

Who Improved His Memory in One Evening

Here is perhaps the most remarkable story of memory power—and what it will do to send a man ahead in business—that I have run across since I learned, to my own great advantage, the secret of a better memory from David M. Roth, the famous memory expert.

It is the true experience of two clerks in New York City who started together, side by side, at the modest salary of $12 a week.

I have the facts straight from John Wesley, one of Mr. Roth's most successful pupils, who began his own business career in the same office with the two clerks, Powers and Weeks, whose story I am going to tell you. I shall give it in Wesley's own words—as nearly as I can recall them—adding that he himself, at 32 years of age, has risen to the Treasurership of one of the best known corporations in New York City.

"Powers," said Wesley, "developed an accurate memory. Weeks was always forgetting. Powers with his dependable memory proved himself invaluable to his employers. He got on amazingly. He was always being pushed ahead. A raise in salary was to him a fixed semi-annual event. Facts and figures he had at his finger ends. He could always be counted on to do anything he was told because his employers found that they could *count* on him to be always remembered.

"Weeks, poor chap, was just the opposite—he was never sure of anything. He always 'guessed' or 'thought,' but never seemed to *know*.

"The man with the memory is now, a few years later, the head of a giant publishing enterprise with a handsome interest in the business and a salary of $30,000 a year. The man who could *not* remember is now collecting petty advertising bills for a New York newspaper. His salary is about $30 a week.

"You see the success of Powers and the failure of Weeks was largely due to one's remarkable memory and the other's inability to remember.

"I am sure this is the answer, because I had an opportunity to observe both men at close range in their daily work."

The Sequel

I saw Wesley five months later and as we were talking about the extraordinary success of the Roth Memory Course I recalled the case of Powers and Weeks.

"That's funny," said Wesley. "Do you know I ran into Weeks only yesterday in Times Square and you never saw such a change in a human being. He is in the new position and is going ahead fast. I always believed he had good stuff in him if he ever found out how to use it but I never dreamed he would get on his feet in five short months; for the last time I saw him he was about the sorriest spectacle you can imagine.

"And to what do you think he attributes his new grip on himself?

"Nothing more or less than the Roth Memory Course, which I sent him in the hope that it would bring him to.

"Not only has Weeks *found* his memory but he has become keener and more observing. He says it is a wonderful feeling to be sure of his facts, as Mr. Roth's lessons have taught him to be.

"He says he is getting to remember faces and names about as easily as his A B Cs and the same with telephone numbers and street addresses and business statistics.

"Weeks may never catch up to Powers, because he let his fellow clerk get a pretty big lead, but I am certain that in another year he will be miles ahead of the point at which he would have been had he not learned from Mr. Roth how to use the perfectly good memory that his recent experience with the Roth Memory Course proves beyond question he possessed all the time." VICTOR JONES.

For obvious reasons Mr. Jones has substituted the names Powers, Weeks and Wesley for the real names of the gentlemen mentioned in this story.

* * * * * *

David M. Roth began with a poor memory himself. He says that more than anything else was what set him to cultivating his own memory and working out the wonderful Roth System which has been responsible for so many thousands of improved memories all over the United States.

Mr. Roth actually could not remember a man's name twenty seconds after being introduced to him.

Yet today there are probably 10,000 people or more in the United States whom Mr. Roth has met at different times—most of them only once—whom he can name instantly on sight.

The accounts of Mr. Roth's amazing memory feats have been published in newspapers all the way from Seattle to New York. He goes into a banquet room or lecture hall and after being introduced to fifty or sixty people turns his back while they change seats. He then picks out every one by name and tells him his telephone number and business connection—for good measure.

As Mr. Roth says, there is nothing miraculous about this. Anyone can do it and the other apparently "impossible" things that so astonish Mr. Roth's audiences.

A Better Memory in One Evening

Mr. Roth's System, which he has developed through years of study, has been put into a course of seven fascinating lessons, so easy that a twelve-year-old child can learn them—yet so effective in their improvement of the memory that hundreds of business executives all over the country—by their own testimony—consider the Roth Course well nigh priceless to them.

Read this letter from C. Louis Allen, who at 32 years became president of a million dollar corporation, the Pyrene Manufacturing Company of New York, makers of the famous fire extinguisher:

"Now that the Roth Memory Course is finished, I want to tell you how much I have **enjoyed** the study of this most fascinating subject. Usually these courses involve a great deal of drudgery, but this has been nothing but pure **pleasure** all the way through. I have derived much benefit from taking the course of instruction and feel that I shall continue to strengthen my memory. That is the best part of it. I shall be glad of an opportunity to recommend your work to my friends."

A single evening spent on the first lesson will give you the secret on which the whole Roth System is based. In that first evening you should easily double your memory power.

Just think what it will mean to you to have **twice** as good a memory. H. Q. Smith, Manager of the Multigraph Sales Company of Montreal, says:

"Here is the whole thing in a nutshell: Mr. Roth has a most remarkable Memory Course. It is simple, and easy as falling off a log. Yet with one hour a day of practice, anyone—I don't care who he is—can improve his memory 100% in a week and 1000% in six months."

And we could show you hundreds of other letters similar to Mr. Smith's—received in the last month alone. After a few hours with Mr. Roth's Course you will be amazed and fascinated at the new sense of confidence and power that will be yours.

You will be freed forever from the artificial memory tricks to which most of us have been slaves.

You will learn to remember instantly:

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Pictures	Household Duties
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And you will find it, not hard work as you might suspect, but just as much fun as playing an absorbing game. For Mr. Roth makes the act of remembering an easy, natural, automatic process of the mind.

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Don't send a single penny. Merely fill out and mail the coupon. By return post, all charges prepaid, the complete Roth Memory Course will be sent to your home.

Study it one evening—more if you like—then if you feel that you can not afford to keep this great aid to more dollars—to bigger responsibilities—to fullest success in life, mail it back to the publishers within five days and you will owe nothing.

Mr. Roth's fee for personal instruction to classes limited to fifty members is $1,000 but in order to secure nation-wide distribution for the Roth Memory Course at the time above all others when Americans need all the self-improvement they can get, the publishers have put the price at only $5.00.

If a better memory means only one-tenth as much to you as it has to thousands of other business men and women, mail the coupon today—NOW—but don't put it off and forget—as those who need the Course the very worst are apt to do. Send the coupon in or write a letter now before the low introductory price is withdrawn.

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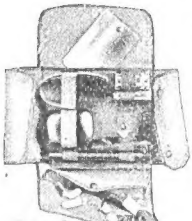

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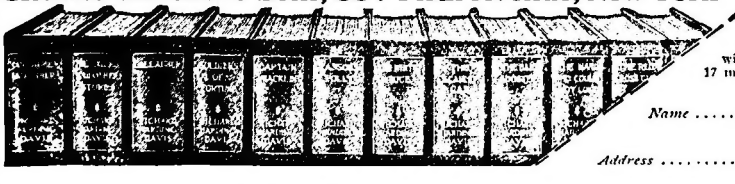

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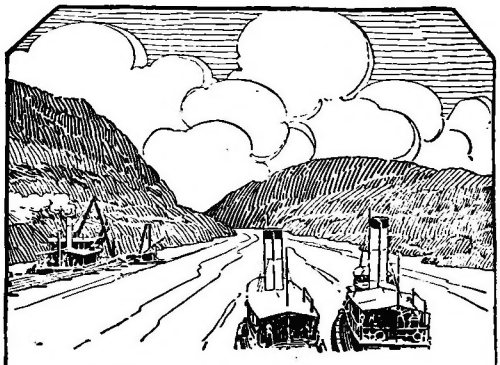

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Spring and Macdougal Streets, - - New York City
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Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $3.00 in advance — **Single Copy, Twenty Cents**

Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 60 cents.
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Cover Design . . . . . **Lawrence Harris**

Headings . . . . . **George M. Richards**

The Next ADVENTURE

Two complete novelettes and a new serial will be three of the features of the First January Issue, in your hands on December 3d.

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THE BROOCH of TLAYA
A Three-Part Story
PART I
By ANNE THROOP CRAIG and LOUISE RICE
A Tale of Ancient Scotland.

For the rest of the stories in the coming number turn to The Trail Ahead, on page 192

First January Number

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The WHITE KHAN

A Complete Novelette

by H·A·LAMB

Author of "The Mighty Manslayer," "The House of Hidden Faces," etc.

Swift as a falcon is the White Khan to protect his people; keen is his eye as the eye of an eagle; his pride in his warriors is the pride of a strong war-horse; his craft in battle is the craft of an aged wolf.

The White Khan's victories are countless as the sands of the Great Desert; his enemies slain are as the drops of water in the river Kerulon. What is the power of the White Khan?

It is the sword of a warrior!

CHAGAN, the strong man, bearer of the two-handed sword, lifted the wine-cup high. He bowed once to the south, once to the north; once each to theewest and east, pouring as he did so a little wine from the cup. As he bowed to the north, in greeting to the dead, the assembled khans roared out a prayer and dashed their wine-beakers against their bearded mouths.

The sun filtered through lofty pines upon the wedding assemblage. Here was Hotai Khan, the host, leader of the Ordus, and Togachar, khan of the Kalkas, with leaders of the Chakars and Kallmarks, the Hoshot, Torgot and Tchoros of the Jun-gar. In the pine wood beside the river Kerulon the khans were assembled after a battle with the Chinese, five years from the birth of the seventeenth century.

For a day they kept high the revelry, always wearing their swords, for quarrels were frequent, and the temper of the Tatar khans was savage. The wedding was that of Berang, son of the white-haired Hotai Khan, and Kerula the Tatar girl, who had been brought to the country of the Jun-gar by a stranger. Hotai Khan had asked for the marriage, for it was his wish to ally himself with the stranger who had come with Kerula and who had brought victory to the standard of the Tatar lords in their last battle with the Chinese.

Hotai Khan, a straight-backed veteran of a hundred battles, blind in one eye, rose from his bench and stepped to the side of Chagan, his sword-bearer. From the breast of his coat he drew forth a parchment inscribed with the written names of Kerula and Berang, and with pictures to represent

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them. This parchment he held high for all to see.

Then stooping over a torch that Chagan grasped in a mighty hand, Hotai Khan touched the edge of the parchment to the fire. The blaze caught it and in a moment the written names of the two young people had disappeared in smoke. Thus, they were married. Chagan lifted his stout voice in a shout of approval, and the lords of the Jun-gar echoed the shout.

Grim men they were, with scarred faces and broad shoulders. They lounged carelessly over the massive tables, quaffing heartily of their favorite drink, mare's milk. It was a Wintry day and a cold wind searched the pines, but the Tatars, warmly clad in jackets of sable furs, long undervests of silk and heavy boots fashioned like horses' hoofs, ignored it. The glances of the khans strayed to Hotai Khan, to Berang and his slim bride and to the stranger. More often than not, as they looked at the stranger, they scowled.

Khlit, the wanderer called the Wolf, famous for his curved sword, heeded not these scowls. He had exchanged his Cossack *svitza* for a fur jacket and tunic of the Tatars, but he still wore his round sheepskin hat. His curved sword hung at his belt, with a pair of Turkish pistols. This sword bore in engraved writing the testimony of his rank. Khlit, outcast from the Cossack camps, was one of the few living descendants of Genghis Khan. He had the blood of Kaidu, the Tatar hero, in his veins.

And for this reason his presence made the khans uneasy. Khlit, the newcomer, outranked them in blood. Moreover, he had aided them in their last battle when they defeated and slew Hang-Hi the Chinese general. Yet he was not a Tatar. He was alone, having reached them without any follower other than the girl Kerula. Who was this wanderer? How were they to receive him in their ranks?

Hotai Khan had not taken his seat after burning the marriage script of his son and Kerula. His glance strayed along the rows of brown faces, and he raised his hand in greeting, carrying it next to his mouth.

"Lords of the Jun-gar," his deep voice rang out, "my son is married to the girl of Khlit. Hence he is now a brother, an *anda*. Honored am I that one of the blood of Kaidu is my *anda*. The smoke of my household will ascend for long, because of this. Let the *nacars* sound, to announce my new brother-in-arms!"

Chagan had been waiting for this, and the sword-bearer motioned to followers of Hotai Khan who were assembled with trumpets. A loud blast of the shrill instruments echoed through the pine grove. At the tables around that of the khans, warriors put down their glasses in surprise. The *nacars* were seldom sounded, save to herald a charge or to announce a council.

The khans consulted each other with glances. They were jealous by nature, and twofold so regarding Khlit. Each was jealous of his rights among the others, and each resented newcomers. In silence they waited for Hotai Khan to continue.

"The honor is great," pursued the old khan bluffly, "for Khlit is a worthy warrior. You do not know how he came here. I have heard the tale from the girl Kerula. He left his own land to seek fighting. He joined the followers of Tal Taulai Khan, who is now dead, without disclosing his rank as descendant of Kaidu. After a mighty battle he went into Persia where he led the Kallmark Tatar horde against an idolatrous fortress."

Some Kallmark chieftains murmured confirmation of this. They had heard of Khlit's entry into Persia. But the others kept silence.

"My *anda* is a true man among warriors," went on Hotai Khan, "for he alone was able to restore the standard of Genghis Khan to us and lead us with it in battle against Hang-Hi whom we defeated bloodily. Not for a generation have the nobles of Tatary seen the Chinese in flight. Is not this proof that Khlit's Tatar blood has led him here, to his brothers? Is he not worthy of high rank among us?"

The murmur that went up at this changed to a growl. Hotai Khan searched the faces of his comrades and found sullen anger written there. He had hoped to have Khlit acknowledged as his brother—a rank that might lead to the post of Kha Khan, White Khan, which could only be held by one of the blood of Genghis, now empty for two generations among the Jun-gar.

Hotai Khan was old in years and his wisdom foresaw that if the khans were to keep from further defeats at the hands of the Chinese, they must have a leader.

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Khlit was entitled by blood to be this leader. So Hotai Khan reasoned, in his wisdom.

Sullen glances were turned toward Khlit, who had not known beforehand of the purpose of Hotai Khan. Berang and Kerula had seized the opportunity to withdraw from the throng and all attention was centered on Khlit, the warrior known as the Wolf.

"What rank will the Tatar lords give to the descendant of Kaidu?" asked Hotai Khan. "It must be a high rank, by token of the warrant written on his sword."

Still the khans did not speak. Hotai Khan flushed in anger, and would have spoken, but a short, powerful warrior in tarnished Persian mail rose from his seat and folded his arms.

"You did not say, Hotai Khan," he growled, "when you bade us drink at the wedding, that it would be a *kurultai*—council. Your words are cunning as the tongue of a wounded fox. We did not come to listen to them. We came to drink with Berang and wish him many sons."

Several of the khans nodded their black heads in agreement. One or two put on their pointed helmets which they had removed when they sat down at the banquet.

"Do your thoughts ever wander further than wine, Togachar?" said Hotai Khan promptly. "They say when you were born your mother would have bathed you in a sack of mare's milk, but you drank it all when she was not looking.--Harken, before another moon or two is ended the khans will be going back to their own districts. Is it not well, while the *kurultai* is assembled, to give rank to one who has nobler blood than we?"

Togachar sat down, disgruntled; but a lean man in leather armor rose, and the eyes of the gathering were turned on him. He lifted his hand in greeting and smiled sardonically on Hotai Khan. This was Chepé Buga, leader of the Chakars.

"Are we, Hotai Khan," he began clearly, "like a woman bereft of her husband, or a herd without a master? Are the Jun-gar like a flock of sheep without herder? Nay, we are lords of our riders and of the Tatar steppe. We would live in friendship and agreement with Khlit, the lord who is called the Wolf. Let him be your *anda*. Is not brotherhood with the oldest of the khans a fitting rank for a stranger?"

The gray-haired warrior bowed his head at the shout of approval that rose at these words. He knew the obstinate independence of the Tatar hordes, and how they would be fighting among themselves before a year was up. Only united by a common purpose could they hope to hold ground against the oncoming hosts of China. He saw the hoped-for chance to bring them together slipping away.

"Khlit is welcome to half my belongings and to half my men," he retorted proudly. "For he is my *anda* and we have exchanged girdles. Yet this is but a poor honor for the warrior who carried the banner of Genghis Khan in our van."

"Where is the standard, Hotai Khan?" queried Chepé Buga, twisting his dark mustache. "Khlit admits that he has put it back where it should be, in the tomb of the mighty Kha Khan. Truly our White Khans, the rulers of the long white mountains of Tatary, have been heroes. Shall we make a stranger such a hero? Nay, we know him not."

The assembly shouted approval at these words, which satisfied their jealousy of power and their hostility to the newcomer.

"How can we make this man a White Khan?" said one angrily. "He is not even a Tatar."

"The standard of Genghis Khan won the victory for us over Hang-Hi," echoed another drunkenly. "Behold how the Khan of Khans watches over his children. This man who has come among us had not a horse to his name. He has not been proved yet."

A clamor of agreement greeted this. As is the way with crowds, the chiefs vied with each other in objections, and even insults to the Cossack. True, they did not know that Hotai Khan alone had been responsible for the proposal to give Khlit rank among them.

"Let us see a little of this warrior's mettle, old war-dog," laughed Chepé Buga, "before he takes his place among the lords of Tatary."

Khlit gave no sign that he understood what had passed, although his knowledge of the Tatar tongue was good. Catching the eye of Hotai Khan, he made a quick gesture of acknowledgment. He pointed the fingers of his right hand toward his

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knee. The handle of his sword he laid on this knee. He bowed his head. This was the Tatar rendering of thanks.

Hotai Khan saw the sword, the blade that had been Kaidu's, and his sharp old face twisted in anger at his failure. Chepé Buga, still laughing at his jest, had lifted his beaker for a general toast when for a second time the *nacars* sounded.

This could not be a summons to the *kurultai*. Chepé Buga's hand went to his sword. At the same instant a roll of drums answered the *nacars*. As one man the assembled Tatars were on their feet. From infancy they had known well the sound of Chinese drums.

II

CONFUSION reigned for another moment in the ranks of the Tatar revelers. With the exception of the khans, every warrior ran to his horse and mounted. Bows and spears flashed out. The horsemen formed into ranks through the pine grove. Squadrons dashed out into the open toward the sound of the drums which came nearer along the river bank.

Then Chagan trotted up to the table. The sword-bearer of Hotai Khan was replacing his mighty two-handed blade in its scabbard, and a grin spread across his tanned face, scarrred by a sword-cut that had sliced away part of one cheek.

"It is a messenger, master," he bellowed; "he rides hither clad like the Prince of Shankiang, with a handful of followers. You can hang me by the thumbs if it is not a Chinese eunuch!"

A shout of laughter greeted this sally. Chagan wheeled his horse away through the grove. Presently, as the drums approached, the men at the table could hear the stentorian voice of the sword-bearer clearing a passage through the ranks of the horsemen who had crowded to see the new arrival.

A lane was cleared leading to the table. The khans beheld a tall, stout man wearing a Ming hat, clad in red silks and nankeen and black satin boots. His horse was caparisoned with green embroidered silks from which jade pendants hung. A dozen mailed riders armed with lances followed him.

The Chinaman caught sight of the gathering around the table. He dismounted with some difficulty and advanced to the khans with a bow. Hotai Khan and his comrades made no response, staring at him curiously. The eunuch's brow glistened with sweat, although the day was chill, and his hands trembled.

He drew a roll of soft paper, wrapped in silk, from his pocket, and motioned to his followers. Two of them beat the kettle-drums they carried on their horses. Whereupon their leader unwrapped the silk from the paper and held it in front of him reverently.

"Greetings and eternal good health to the Mongol khans," he said in good Tatar, "and felicitations from the World-Honored One, the Son of Heaven and the Star of Good Hope."

Khlit wondered as he saw the emissary turn respectfully and bow nine times toward the south. He noticed that the eunuch's hand shook so that the paper trembled like a leaf.

"Speak," growled Togachar impatiently, "or Chagan will cut your feet from under you, offspring of a dog!"

The trembling of the paper continued, but the voice of the emissary was even as he answered.

"Thrice honor and prosperity to the Mongol khans, neighbors and subjects of the Emperor Wan Li——"

A roar of anger greeted this, silenced by Hotai Khan.

"Who have been so imprudent as to take up arms against an army of the Son of Heaven, and slay one of the generals, Hang-Hi. It is written that with the slayer of his kin a man may not live under the same sky. Such is the wisdom of our ancestors. The general Hang-Hi was a cousin of the Divine Person, and his death will be fully avenged. The great general of the Imperial Court, Li Jusong, has been called from Korea and has taken a vow of vengeance. Evil will follow this act of the Mongol khans——"

"The evil will begin upon your fat, divine person," muttered Chepé Buga aloud, and the eunuch shuddered.

"As a beginning of the vengeance," he pursued, "Li Jusong, who marches to destroy the khans, seconded by the Dragon Emperor, and by the Lilies of the Court, decrees that the strange warrior who carried the Mongol standard in the battle which

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caused the death of Hang-Hi shall be given up. Failing this, the men of the Lily of the Court society will see to it that he is brought alive to the Emperor Wan Li. This is the imperial mandate to the Mongol khans. Wan Li, Son of Heaven, thus ends his message to his subjects."

The eunuch closed the roll of paper. He faced the assembly calmly, although his fat cheeks were quivering. A brief silence followed. Several of the Tatars glanced at Khlit irresolutely. Jealousy showed in their eyes. Chepé Buga, however, stepped to the emissary and snatched the paper, which he flung on the ground, spitting on it.

"Are we subjects, scion of the devil's worst brood?" he roared. "We will show your imperial master what we think of him. Chagan! See that nails are brought and driven into the ears of this fat beast."

The grinning sword-bearer hastened away on his mission. Hotai Khan stepped forward, but Togachar restrained him.

"What is your name, old woman?" the latter flung at the terrified eunuch.

"Cho Kien, lord," responded the emissary, his lips trembling. "Have mercy on an ambassador!"

"Why, Cho Kien," laughed Chepé Buga, "after such a message do you expect to be pampered like a palace jade? Surely, you do not fear to join the Son of Heaven in the sky—by way of Hades. Hurry hither the nails. We will have good sport."

Before Chagan could make his appearance, another stepped between Chepé Buga and the emissary. Khlit faced Chepé Buga and Hotai Khan. But he spoke to the other Tatars as well.

"Harken, noble lords," he said in Tatar, "I have a boon to ask. Has not this man come with a message that concerns me? I am the man he seeks. Then let me answer him. And talk no more of nails. My answer must be taken to the emperor himself."

Some of the riders murmured disapproval at being robbed of their sport. But the khans and Cho Kien waited in silence. The slant eyes of the eunuch fastened on Khlit and he drew a long breath of relief. He had not expected mercy from the khans, knowing the message he was bringing them.

"Cho Kien," said Khlit slowly, and the Tatars hung on his words, "your life will be spared, to take his word to the man who is your master. Forget it not. The man you seek is Khlit, called the Wolf by his enemies—such that still live. He did not slay Hang-Hi, who committed suicide after his defeat. If your master wants vengeance on Khlit, tell him to come for it. He will not find me in the ranks of the Tatar khans but elsewhere. That is my message."

Hotai Khan stepped forward and laid his hand on Khlit's arm.

"Nay," he said anxiously, "you will be among us, lord. Are you not my *anda?* Am I not sworn to protect you with my sword and my blood? The arm of the Dragon Emperor is long, through his spies whose societies are found in all Tatary and the world. Half my men are yours to command. The Khantai Khan mountains and the river Kerulon will guard us. Berang has left me. My home will be empty without you."

Khlit made again the gesture of thanks and this time his hand lingered on his sword.

"Hotai Khan," he said, "your words are those of a brother. But I have no place among the ranks of the khans. Do you think I did not hear what was said at the council? I shall be alone when the men of the Dragon Emperor come to seek me."

"Nay, lord," spoke up Chepé Buga hastily, "do not leave us. Our swords will carve the carcasses of those who come after you."

With a grim smile Khlit shook his gray head.

"I ask it not, noble lord. My enemies have been many, but my sword has served me well——"

"The men of the Dragon Emperor have other weapons than swords," objected Hotai Khan. "If your death is decreed your sword will do little for you, outside our protection."

"It is the sword of Kaidu, the hero, Hotai Khan. When have the White Khans asked protection of men? I am of their blood. Cho Kien, you have heard what we have said. Tell it to your master. Now, go!"

Hastily the eunuch seized the chance to escape. He mounted with more eagerness than skill, and shouted to his followers. The mailed riders wheeled their horses behind him and broke into a gallop once they were clear of the Tatar ranks. Followed by the gibes of the Tatars they disappeared in the direction of the river.

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III

NO SENTRIES watched at the edge of Hotai Khan's camp that night. There was shouting and drinking in the tents, following the marriage of Berang. But sentries were unknown in Tatar camps. The descendants of Genghis Khan held their enemies in scorn, and they never kept watch for a possible foe, proud of their strength.

Snow had begun to fall with darkness, and sifted in under the branches of the pine-trees. The ground was already carpeted white, and the tents were cloaked with it. Through the snow, past the lighted tents and flaming torches, Khlit guided his horse.

The Cossack walked his horse until the last of the tents were left behind, and then he shook the flakes from his shoulders and broke into a trot. His shoulders were not as square as they had once been. His head bowed more than formerly. His thoughts were not cheering companions.

Once before he had ridden thus from the camp of the Cossacks, never to return. A second time he had left the *yurta* of the Kallmark Tatars, driven by the same impulse to wander. It may have been that it was the call of his ancestor's blood that had drawn him to the Tatar steppe. He had fought his way to the camp of the Jun-gar, who were his kin, and among them he had thought to find companions for the last days of his life.

For Khlit was no longer young. His arm, tireless in battle until now, was failing him, and more than ever he found himself depending on craft to aid him against his foes. The curved sword had not been drawn from its sheath for many months. Khlit's pride, that had separated him from comrades of the Cossack camp, would not let him dwell amid the jealousies of the Jun-gar khans. He set out again, as he had done in the past, to match his wits against a foe. But this time he knew that his strength was not equal to his former efforts. And the wanderer realized that this enemy was greater than those of former years. The Dragon Emperor was not easily to be cheated of a victim.

Khlit pulled his saddle-bags, containing food and powder, tighter. He had put on a long fur coat, but the cold pierced through it. His horse turned its head and neighed, edging to one side as if to turn back to the camp. Khlit jerked it forward in silence.

The next instant he was erect in the saddle and alert. The snow on the rough road made things visible some distance in advance. He made out the figure of a rider standing motionless a few paces ahead.

It was not a sentry, for none was posted. Also, it was no one who had taken the trail ahead of him, for the rider waited, his horse drawn up across the road. The man, whoever he was, could not have heard Khlit coming over the soft snow.

Khlit did not halt. He loosened his saber in its scabbard, and bent forward watchfully. The figure had not stirred, yet he felt that the man was observing him closely. His horse trotted forward, sniffing at the newcomer. They were within arm's reach of each other when Khlit caught a sudden movement, and the flash of a sword over the rider's head.

His own blade was out instantly and he urged his mount ahead suddenly by a pressure of the knees. He saw the other horse start back in alarm and the sword of the rider whirl over him. Parrying the heavy stroke of the other, Khlit threw the full weight of himself and his mount against the man, and felt the rider fall as his horse stumbled to its knees. The man sprang clear cleverly and confronted Khlit on foot.

The Cossack had wheeled his horse with uplifted blade for a second stroke when he was startled by a hearty laugh in the darkness. The man was standing before him, but with lowered weapon. Khlit halted distrustfully. As he did so a deep voice hailed him.

"Aye, it is true. It was well done, Khlit, lord, and I am content. By the mane of my grandfather's sire, I was nearly a dead man. But put up the curved sword. I have had a good taste of it. Save it for others."

A sudden suspicion struck Khlit.

"What name do you bear, O striker in the dark?" he asked grimly.

"They call me Chagan," the voice growled, "and I was sword-bearer to the Ordu Khan until tonight. I saw you leaving the camp, and followed. Knowing the way I easily got ahead of you. I had a mind to test the curved sword of Kaidu and I find it well to my liking."

With that Chagan swung his heavy bulk skilfully into his saddle, and came close to Khlit.

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"Lord," he said slowly, "think not I meant evil. This great sword of mine has split men to the wish-bone, but it was not laid heavily against you. I watched in the battle, and saw you bearing the standard of the White Khan, Genghis. I care not for talk of rank. I have seen what I have seen."

"What mean you, Chagan?" said Khlit. "I go alone, and there is peril ahead. My arm is not as strong as it was, to swing the curved sword. Get you back to the *yurta* where there is good wine."

"Aye," laughed the sword-bearer, "I had a skinful of it. If there is danger so much the better. But where you go, I go. Did I not see the standard of Genghis Khan in your hand? My eyes do not lie."

Khlit sheathed his sword with a grunt.

"It is like a dog to bay without sense," he growled. "And a dog tries to make game of what it lacks sense to understand. I am going into the country of the Dragon. Get back to your kennel, dog!"

He urged his horse past the huge sword-bearer and galloped on down the trail. Before he had gone a hundred paces Chagan was beside him. Khlit lengthened the stride of his horse, but Chagan had chosen his mount with care and kept pace.

"You have named me well, lord," he growled. "I am a dog. And when was a dog sent home when a hunt was on?"

"Turn back, Chagan, one without wits, or Hotai Khan will be without a sword-bearer."

Chagan reined his steed behind Khlit, for the trail had narrowed.

"Hotai Khan is without one now," he made answer with a chuckle. "Nay, I know the paths around here, to the Dragon country or elsewhere. I have seen the standard in your hands. Is not the battle thickest where the standard flies? I scent a battle in the wind."

Khlit made no answer. Putting his horse to its best pace he succeeded in distancing Chagan to some degree. He turned aside into a grove of pines when he guessed that dawn was not far off. Dismounting and tethering his horse, he took a skin from his saddle and hung it to keep the driving snow off him as he spread his coat on the ground to sleep.

The sun was high and the snow had ceased falling when he wakened. He crawled from his robe and stood up. Then he saw that another skin had been stretched over his own. Beside his horse another was tied. At his feet he saw a bulky form on the ground. It was nearly covered with a white drift. Khlit recognized the scarred face that turned up to him. The man had slept outside the shelter in the night. And it was Chagan, the sword-bearer.

IV

KHLIT lost no time in putting a considerable distance between himself and the Tatar camp. He did not want to be followed, and he was grateful for the snow that had covered his tracks. He pressed ahead quickly, in a southeasterly direction that he knew would take him across the limits of Tatary and the plains that extended to the Liao River.

Chagan was not to be left behind, and Khlit was forced to reconcile himself to the company of the sword-bearer. The latter proved himself valuable in many ways. He led Khlit to a ford over the Kerulon. This river, he told the Cossack, formed the barrier that had been the scene of many battles between the retreating khans and the hosts of the Dragon Emperor.

As the two left the scattered *yurtas* of Tatars behind and came in sight of mud villages along the streams, Chagan conducted Khlit around the main caravan paths and the villages so that they were not observed.

Chagan made no comment on the course Khlit directed him to take. Apparently the sword-bearer was well content to follow where his master led. Only once did he ask a question.

"Lord," he said one morning when the two were beginning their trot over the snow plains, "you have called me one without wit. Truly that is the case, for what need have I for wit when I follow you? Yet I would know one thing. What part of the empire is our destination? Are we going beyond the Wall?"

"Nay, I think not," responded Khlit. "Some travelers told us that the army of Li Jusong had passed the Wall and was riding northwest. If a fox wishes to hide from the hounds, is not the best hiding-place the house of the master of the hounds? For the hounds go afield from the house.

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I am going to the army of Li Jusong. They will not know me for a Tatar."

"Aye, that's very well," grumbled Chagan, who did not seem overpleased with this. "But these hounds of ours have a keen nose for game. They are hard to throw off the scent. The Lilies of the Court that the fat fool Cho Kien mentioned are a society pledged to exterminate Tatars in China. They have sacked many cities outside the Wall. Aye, they are a poisonous sort of lilies, with their magicians that spy out the future. There will be many of the society in the ranks of Li Jusong, for he marches against Tartary."

Khlit glanced shrewdly at his companion. Chagan was not the man to be held back from fear. Yet it was plain that he liked the Lilies of the Court but little.

"Where can we meet the army of Li Jusong, Chagan?" he asked.

The sword-bearer scowled in thought and pointed ahead of them.

"Four days' fast riding from here is the city of Shankiang," he ventured, "a border city. It lies in the course of Li Jusong, and at the rate we are traveling we may reach it a little before he does. Shankiang is not a city of China, for it borders the upper Liao, where the people are Holangs, merchants and traders for the most part and unwarlike. They are neither Tatars nor Chinese. There you can see your fill of the men of Han and the silk devils of the Dragon Throne."

On learning that Khlit would go to Shankiang Chagan had a further suggestion to make. Khlit, he pointed out, had a full growth of hair on his head and in his mixed costume might pass for an ordinary traveler. Once in Shankiang, he said, they could stable their horses and Tatar trappings and go about on foot where they would attract less attention. But he, Chagan, would need a more complete disguise.

Their swords they must keep. So Chagan proposed that he purchase the clothes of a wrestler on the way to the city. His head was already shaven on the front of his skull, and if he shaved it entirely, it would be in the fashion of a wrestler. The two-handed sword would then be in keeping with his costume, for the stout wrestlers carried such weapons as a mark of their craft.

To this Khlit agreed. He knew that it would cost Chagan misgivings to shave his treasured hind lock of hair. But the sword-bearer's great size would bear out his character of a wrestler. Whatever danger Khlit ran from Chagan's presence would be balanced by the information the other could give him concerning the Chinese. All that would be necessary was for Chagan to keep silence in public where his tongue might betray him. Khlit, in the character of a Uigur traveler, could speak the tongue he had learned in Samarkand.

It was a favorite trick of the old Cossack to hide among the hunters when he was hunted. The army of Li Jusong would be made up of a hundred different clans, including warriors from Nankao to Holang, and in the myriad of fighters he might well be safe. In reasoning thus, Khlit had lost none of his cunning. He had, however, not reckoned upon two things. One was the prophecy of Li Chan Ko, magician of Li Jusong; the other was the Lilies of the Court.

Thus it happened that when Khlit rode with his companion into sight of the walled city of Shankiang he had the appearance of a traveler who was accompanied by a wrestler as henchman. Chagan's bulk was swathed in a padded quilt, bound around with silk sashes painted to represent his prowess; his Tatar boots were discarded for cotton wrappings, and a fur cap displaced his pointed helmet. The scar that ran down his cheek bore out his character, and his long hair had been shaved off.

The rough trails and caravan paths over the plains had changed to a broad road occupied by merchants' equipages, by wandering beggars and by peasants carrying fish and grain to the city. On either side of the road the wind-bells of tiled pagodas sounded cheerily; occasional stone pillars fashioned to charm away devils lined the way. Passing camels brushed past the horses of Khlit and Chagan.

The road joined the Liao River near the walls, and Khlit saw a multitude of junks drawn up along the banks. When evening fell and they were about to enter the gates, he saw the merchants and beggars with them point to the river and touch their foreheads in reverence.

Looking out he saw a large junk drifting down the current. It bore a multitude of colored lanterns, and banners floated from the mast and prow. The men on

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the junks along the banks raised a shrill chant as the vessel passed them. Khlit turned inquiringly to Chagan.

"They say," whispered the latter contemptuously, "that the junk is sent out with lanterns to light the wandering ghosts of the dead. May the evil spirits rip my hide, but they had best waited until Li Jusong had gone. There will be more dead, then. Aye, the ghosts will be plentiful."

So Chagan said, not knowing the prophecy of Li Chan Ko, magician of Li Jusong. But when he entered the towered gate of Shankiang, he touched Khlit's shoulder and pointed out over the river. In the distance the sun was setting. It was a dull, angry red in color. And between them and the sun drifted the lighted lanterns of the junk on its silent course down the river.

V

The Courts of Purgatory are filled not only from the City of Old Age. The Rakchas are gleeful when they hear the sound of trumpets summoning men into battle on earth.

For on the terrace of night the sleepers will throng. Surely, they are sleeping, since they went to their graves as beds.

—*The Kang Mu Chronicles.*

THE first thing that Chagan did on arriving in Shankiang was to find stables for the horses of the travelers, and quarters for themselves in the merchants' section of the town near-by. He bargained for a room over a candle-maker's shop where a window opened upon one of the main streets of the city. Another aperture in the rear gave access to a walled-in garden where the candle-maker, Wen Shu by name, tended a miniature garden in his leisure hours.

Never, save in Samarkand, had Khlit been in a city of the size of Shankiang. Unlike Tatar cities, the wall was the sole defense of the place—a wall of stone some forty feet in height, surmounted by occasional towers and pierced by four gates. Within the wall was a solid mass of wooden buildings, humming like a hive with its populace.

While he waited for the coming of Li Jusong, Khlit wandered through the streets of Shankiang, visiting the teeming water-front, and the booths of the journeying scholars who wrote letters and books for their clients, by the walled temples of the monks. At a shop set up outside their quarters he bought a set of ivory chessmen from a vender, saying to Chagan that it was well to have a trade when Li Jusong's men should question them. To this Chagan heartily agreed.

The giant sword-bearer seemed not in the best of humor. He spent long hours at the water-front during the days of waiting, and returned with the news that Li Jusong had been seen approaching the Liao River. Also, he said, junks were hurrying to the city from the upper stretches of the river. That was foolish, Chagan declared, in the face of a coming army which was not allied to the Holangs.

Khlit watched Chagan closely, and he could have sworn the man had more on his mind that he was willing to tell. More than once the sword-bearer broke off what he was saying, to stare at his weapon in silence.

"Li Jusong should be here within three days," Khlit observed to him one morning as they left their quarters.

"Aye," said Chagan, "is not that what you are waiting for?"

The strange speech stuck in Khlit's mind. A curtained sedan was carried past them, and Khlit caught a glimpse of a yellow face peering out from the curtains. He noticed what appeared to be a badge of office on the hat of the man in the sedan. Chagan, however, plucked at his arm, and hurried him away into the crowd.

"That was one of the Lily of the Court officials," he whispered excitedly. "There are too many in the city, master, to please me. We may yet be strung up on the bone-crackers of their torture chambers, you and I!"

"Dog of the devil, Chagan," growled Khlit, "I knew not you could be so easily frightened!"

"I — frightened?" Chagan stared his amazement. "Nay, but this place reeks of evil-doing. I am sick for the plains and a horse."

That evening, when the lanterns were hung outside the doors, Chagan came hurrying into the walled garden where Khlit was sitting nursing his sword.

"The beggars in the market-place who have come from outside say that Li Chan Ko, the magician of Li Jusong, has told a prophecy about Shankiang. They say

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the mandarins of the city are debating shutting the gates to Li Jusong, for the men of Han bear them no good-will."

The next day the city was rife with talk and the crowds thronged the streets. Khlit could not understand what was said, but he realized that the people were agitated. Bodies of infantry ill disciplined and worse armed were hurrying back and forth. The junks completely blocked the river.

The prospect of the city shutting its gates to the coming army had not occurred to Khlit. He was not aware of the feuds between the men of Han and Wang under the Dragon Emperor and the outlying districts. He made his way to the southern gate in time to see an imposing cavalcade of mandarins and priests trot forth and the doors swing to behind them.

"They are emissaries going to Li Jusong," Chagan explained after the sword-bearer had questioned a bystander, a small, bright-eyed archer clad in complete mail with an ax slung at his belt.

The latter swung around at Chagan's words and stared at the two curiously.

"Ho there, those are foreign words," he chuckled, closing one eye, "but fear not, my tongue does not wag by itself. Here, it pays to say little. One dog barks at nothing and the rest bark at him."

"What man are you, Archer?" questioned Khlit, for the other spoke a Tatar dialect that he understood.

"Nobody's man, uncle, but his who pays the most. I am a wanderer of Manchu blood, at present in the employ of the mandarins of this cursed city. Men call me Arslan; I am captain of a ten of archers on the walls. Likewise, a lusty singer. Harken —harken."

Arslan lifted a melodious voice:

"An arbor of flowers,
And a kettle of wine.
Alas! in the bowers
No companion is mine.

"Then the moon sheds her rays
On my goblet and me,
And my shadow betrays
We're a party of three.

"Though the moon can not swallow
Her share of the grog
And my shadow must follow
Wherever I jog.

"See the moon—how she glances
Response to my song.
See my shadow—it dances
So lightly along.

"While sober I feel
You are both my good friends.
When drunken I reel—
Our boon fellowship ends."

"By the looks of things," muttered Chagan, "your arrows will be flying before long and by the same token a Lily-handled dagger will stick from your shoulder-blades."

"Not mine," laughed Arslan. "For I am stationed on the Tower of the Five Falcons, which is loftiest of all on the walls. Harken, wrestler—you bear a goodly sword. If there is fighting, come to the Tower of the Five Falcons. Then you will see some pretty bow-and-arrow work!"

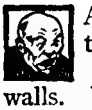
"Aye, we may come to toss your carcass over the walls, cousin Arslan," growled Chagan.

But the archer turned away with a laugh. They heard him humming to himself as he disappeared in the crowd.

When they returned to the shop, Wen Shu had left his work and was laying a sacrifice of food and drink before his ancestral tablet in the sanctuary of the garden. More troops moved through the streets that night, and the gates were kept shut.

By the following night the embassy had not returned. Rumors were rife that the mandarins had been held as hostages and that Li Jusong had ordered the gates to be opened, and all soldiers to be disarmed. The cavalry of the Chinese general were reported in the suburbs. Khlit and Chagan slept that night in their boots and with their swords under their hands.

VI



AT DAWN, the *Kang Mu* relates, the gates of Shankiang were closed.

Khlit was not able to return to the walls. When he tried to force through the crowds in the streets he was thrown back by armed bodies of horsemen. Shots were heard, and a wail went up from the women of Shankiang. Chagan and Khlit had agreed that in case the town resisted they would take to their horses, and await the arrival of Li Jusong. It might be possible to mingle with the ranks of the Chinese if they entered the place. But neither he nor Chagan was prepared for what followed.

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They were unable to reach the stable and had drawn to one side of the street under an archway. The crowd surged back on them as a mounted man rode down the street. His armor was torn and he was without a weapon. Two footmen struggled to keep up with the rider by clinging to his stirrups. They also were without arms, although their badges showed them to be retainers of the mandarins. They were heading for the river.

After the rider had passed the people began to run into the houses. Merchants with their families in sedan-chairs, accompanied by servants, thronged down the alleys that led to their junks. The wailing of women rose higher. From time to time bursts of musket-shots sounded from the south. A bare-headed *bonze* with streaming garments came panting by them. When Chagan caught the latter's long sleeve to detain him, the priest tore himself loose and ran on with half his coat left in the Tatar's hand.

The street was nearly deserted by now and Khlit motioned Chagan to resume their course to the stable. Like the Tatar, he felt the need of a horse between his legs, for he was not used to fighting on foot. They had not gone a dozen paces, however, when a group of horsemen came galloping toward them. They barely had time to jump aside into a doorway before the riders swept past like a torrent, several gorgeously robed mandarins in their midst.

"They go like men who want to save their skins," growled Chagan. "Ha!"

He pointed after the horsemen. In the center of the alley a short distance away lay a quivering heap of silk. The *bonze* had not been quick to jump aside.

New crowds hurrying down to the junks barred the way to the stable and the two were forced to turn back to the candle-maker's shop. They found Wen Shu with his wife and daughter in their best robes sitting quietly in the closed shop. With a hurried question, Chagan left the candle-maker and followed Khlit to their room.

"The city is attacked, master," he explained, "and we will see little of Li Jusong, save the swords of his followers. What is your will?"

"To eat," said Khlit calmly, suiting the action to the word. "The walls of the town are strong. Li Jusong will have a hard time breaking in."

Chagan shook his head moodily at this, but, observing that Khlit was making away with the best portions of the rice and fish he fell to eating with the Cossack. That done, Chagan stretched full length on the floor and was soon asleep. Khlit watched by the window.

It was impossible now to leave the city by the walls. And Khlit was loath to join the mad rush for the junks. He waited for darkness, when it might be possible to venture abroad and learn more of what was happening. The sound of musketry presently ceased. The pandemonium in the street was quieter. Khlit heard the beat of horses' hoofs.

Looking out, he saw a troop of riders in blue coats with banners trotting down the street in good order, four abreast. The sight reassured him somewhat, and he shook Chagan into wakefulness.

"These are better warriors than the others we have seen," he observed to the Tatar.

"Aye, your eye is keen, master," chuckled Chagan; "those are some of Li Jusong's Leo Tung men."

He disappeared down the stairs leading to the shop, returning after a moment. Stretching his giant arms wide he gave a huge yawn and shook himself like a dog.

"It was a good sleep," he growled. "Come, Khlit, lord, we had best be stirring or we will be smoked out like dead fish. Wen Shu says that the city has fallen. Some of the infantry held the southern gate for a while, but the followers of the Lily treacherously opened the eastern gate to Li Jusong's cavalry. It will be an evil night for Shankiang and you and I will have work for our swords."

Khlit buckled his belt tighter and filled his pipe with tobacco. When the pipe was lighted to his satisfaction he turned to Chagan.

"What kind of men are these, Chagan?" he said, sweeping his arm in the direction of the city. "The walls could have kept Li Jusong out for a year——"

"In Tatary, yes, master. But in China there is always a traitor and a back door. Also a dagger in the kidneys of a true fighter. Come, I will show you proof of what has happened."

Khlit followed Chagan down to the shop, where the Tatar paused, pointing grimly to where Wen Shu sat cross-legged on the floor, bowing back and forth in grief. All

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the candles and lanterns of the shop had been lighted. Incense burned at the ancestral shrine. Flowers were arranged in the vases.

Clearly outlined in the many-colored glow, Khlit saw the figures of the wife and daughter of Wen Shu. Dressed in their dainty garments, the two women hung from a rafter over the head of the candlemaker. Silken cords were around their white throats, and fastened to the rafter.

"He will wait there until a Han sword severs his neck also," explained Chagan. "These people allow themselves to be slain like sheep once a city is taken. Still, Wen Shu has the satisfaction of seeing his women dead before the warriors of Li Jusong get here. I know, for I have carved up many like him."

With that Chagan led the way into the street and Khlit followed silently. Evening was falling, but the sky was lighted by the glow of numerous fires. The smell of smoke was in the air. Khlit led Chagan into another street on the way to the stable. Here bodies were lying.

Chagan took no notice of them, but Khlit stooped at the first one and, drawing his curved sword, dipped it into the pool of blood beside the body which was that of a child. The Tatar, seeing this, did likewise, with a grin.

"Better to be thought wolves than sheep, Chagan," said Khlit grimly.

The prospect of danger had brought a light to his eyes and a flush to his lean cheeks. With bared swords the two passed on, keeping close together, in the direction of their horses. As they went they saw new evidence of the coming of Li Jusong.

By a many-storied pagoda which was blazing to its summit they saw a heap of bodies. The unfortunates who had taken refuge in the temple had been forced by the flames to come out, only to meet the swords of the Han warriors. So much Khlit read in the sight of the bodies, for he was old in the ways of warfare. He had stooped over the forms, when one of them, a slender girl, struggled upright and faced him.

The child was wild-eyed with fright, and her trembling hands gripped her throat. She stared blindly at Khlit, plainly expecting his sword to descend on her. Chagan took her by the shoulder and pulled her to her feet with rough good-nature.

"Get you into that alley, doll-face," he bellowed, pointing to a dark opening at one side of the burning building, "or Li Jusong's butchers will sharpen their blades —ha! Watch, Khlit, lord!"

A group of pikemen had run into the open space from another street and approached them. Chagan gave the girl a hasty shove, as if to cast her down among the bodies again. But instead of obeying him she pulled the form of a small boy to his feet beside her. The infant seemed to be wounded, for he was dripping blood. Holding the boy close to her the girl remained motionless.

The pikemen had come up to them, and one of them questioned Chagan roughly. The sword-bearer made no reply, not understanding what the other said. Before Khlit realized what had happened one of the pikemen had thrust his weapon into the girl's side. She sank to her knees with a low moan.

The boy gave a cry of anguish and clutched the hand of the soldier. With a laugh the pikeman wrenched his spear loose from the girl and wiped it clean on the boy's garments. His half-dozen companions closed threateningly around Khlit and Chagan.

At the same instant Khlit's curved sword flashed up. It whirled swiftly against the throat of the pikeman. The soldier dropped beside the girl, his head hanging from his shoulders by a strip of flesh.

The spears of the others were lifted at Khlit, who had slashed the face of a second man with the same stroke that slew the murderer of the girl. He sprang back, only to see three of the menacing pikes knocked to the ground by a stroke of Chagan's huge sword, with its foot-wide blade. He warded off the stroke of the fourth man, drawing a pistol at the same time.

Khlit discharged his pistol at the waist of the man who had struck at him and turned to Chagan. His sword was lifted for a second stroke, but he stayed his hand. Chagan's blade, falling again, had dashed two of the men to earth with split heads. The survivor had dropped his pike and taken to his heels. He did not go far, however.

With an oath Chagan caught up one of the pikes at his feet. Dropping his heavy sword for an instant he poised the spear and hurled it after the fugitive with all the strength of his long arm. The weapon

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caught the man in the small of the back and he dropped to his knees.

"The hunting has begun, Chagan," cried Khlit, "but other dogs are coming. Follow me!"

With a backward glance at groups of Chinese who were running toward them from each end of the street Khlit turned and dived into the alley that Chagan had pointed out to the girl. The sword-bearer pounded at his heels.

VII

THE alley was shut off from the light from the burning pagoda, but the sky was bright with the general conflagration of the city. Khlit saw that he was running down a passage between large buildings. He caught sight of an opening at his right and turned aside. Two dim objects about the height of a man confronted him. These he recognized as the stone drums of the city, now deserted.

He had been that way before, and with a flash of memory he swerved into a gateway that led him to a flight of steps. Up these he climbed, with the watchful Tatar at his heels. The steps led to a jade and stone gateway of the central Buddhist temple.

A cry from below told him that the pursuers had caught sight of them from the street. Chagan gave a curse, but Khlit drew him silently into the temple. It was deserted. The long hall that led to the giant bronze figure of Buddha was empty of worshipers. There was no place of concealment in the hall and Khlit, perforce, ran on to the figure of the cross-legged god.

At the very feet of the image stretched a white form. One of the priests had been slain in his sanctuary, for a red line blurred the white of the robe from throat to waist. Khlit wasted no time, but sought along the wall for the doors he knew must be there, opening into the priests' apartments. A silken curtain covered the wall, but when Chagan thrust at it with his sword, it yielded and they pushed under it, finding themselves in an ebony-and-lacquer chamber, lighted by red lanterns.

A white robe flitted away down a passage that led from the priests' chamber and Khlit sprang after it, panting with the effort he was making. The fleeing priest, who must have imagined that death stalked him, led them down the passage and through a narrow door out on a terrace on the further side of the building.

The wretched man had flung himself imploringly on the ground before them. Khlit stepped over his prostrate form, and Chagan followed him, bestowing a hearty kick on the priest as he did so. They were now in a cherry garden belonging to the temple. A few minutes more and they had reached the edge of the garden, unseen by their pursuers who had stopped to slay the priest.

A stone wall confronted them, but this problem Chagan easily solved. Sheathing his sword, the Tatar swung himself up to the summit of the wall. Reaching down a powerful hand he drew Khlit beside him. They dropped to the further side and walked down the alley in which they found themselves.

It opened out into a wide square filled with moving bands of soldiers. Khlit realized that hesitation would mean disaster for them. Motioning to Chagan to follow, he stepped out among the Chinese. The latter, seeing their crimson swords, took no further notice of them. When they had put a safe distance between them and the temple garden, Khlit halted, leaning on his sword to recover breath.

He saw that they stood in a square one side of which was bordered by the city wall. The scene was outlined by flames behind them, and Khlit made out a tower opposite, rising against the wall and above it to a considerable height.

The Chinese around them were discharging arrows at the summit of the tower. Others were crowding around the door which was already nearly blocked with dead. On the summit of the tower were several defenders who were replying to the arrows of the besiegers. Khlit could see the helmets of the men on the tower appear at the edge of the rampart to let fly an arrow and then draw back. They had already taken heavy toll of the attackers.

Chagan, who had been scanning the tower closely, pointed up at it.

"The Tower of the Five Falcons, master," he whispered. "I see the archer, Arslan, up there. His men shoot like devils. We had best go elsewhere or our friend Arslan will settle his score with me with one of his shafts."

The streets leading from the square were nearly deserted by the Holangs, and the

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two were able to avoid wandering bands of Li Jusong's men. Khlit traced his way back to the merchants' quarter, and eventually they came to the stable where their horses had been left. The beasts were gone.

Chagan flung himself down on a heap of straw with an oath and Khlit seated himself beside the sword-bearer. Drawing bread and meat from a wallet at his belt the Cossack began to eat calmly, sharing his food with Chagan. Khlit was too old a warrior to be disturbed by the slaughter that was going on around them throughout the city of Shankiang.

"We will wait here until daylight," he told Chagan. "Tomorrow we may find a place in the ranks of Li Jusong."

Chagan paused in the act of swallowing a mouthful of meat and stared at his companion curiously. He started to speak, then thought better of it. But for the remainder of the night, which was hideous with the sound of slaying and pillage, he kept silence. More than once Khlit found the giant looking at him moodily.

When the sun was well up the two went out of the stable. Stopping only to take a long drink at the well in the yard, they returned to the streets of the stricken city. Quiet prevailed. Nothing was to be seen save the bodies that filled the gutters and the doorways of houses. Smoke rose densely from several quarters of the town.

The quiet did not deceive Khlit. He had no need to ask Chagan to know that the sack of Shankiang was not ended; that it had only begun.

VIII

ON TURNING into one of the main streets, lined with shopkeepers' painted signs, Khlit and Chagan came face to face with a procession of Holang prisoners. They were marching in single file, escorted by a party of Han men, and were tied together by a long rope.

"Like a string of pearls," Chagan said.

The party was led by an officer of great height and imposing appearance. This man halted the procession as Khlit and Chagan came abreast him, and scanned them closely. Chagan returned his gaze with an impudent stare. Khlit essayed a word of greeting in the Uigur tongue to which the officer did not reply.

"What is your name and business, graybeard?" the Chinese asked finally. "You wear strange clothes."

"A traveling chess-player, sir," responded Khlit quickly, "with my servant. Can you direct us to Li Jusong?"

"The general of the Son of Heaven is out inspecting the streets, Uigur," answered the officer. "He would welcome you if you are truly a chess-player, for the game is his distinguished delight. Your servant is big of bone. I am weary of killing these swine. We will have some sport. Len Shi!"

He struck his fan sharply against his leg, and a giant Chinaman made his appearance from among the troops with a low bow. The officer spoke to him sharply and gave a command to his men. Two of them went into a shop and returned with a chair in which he seated himself. Two others brought a square of silk of the width of five paces which they spread in the street. The prisoners watched apathetically.

"Your man is a wrestler," said the officer to Khlit. "Len Shi is also a wrestler, a rascal of strength and skill. We will see which is the better man."

When Khlit interpreted this to Chagan, who did not understand the Uigur tongue, the Tatar cast a calculating glance at Len Shi. Big as Chagan was, the Chinaman was broader at the shoulders and heavier by fifty pounds. When Len Shi had doffed his quilted coat and undertunic, two massive arms showed, topped by a bull neck.

Chagan followed the example of his adversary promptly. He seemed no whit afraid, although he wore a scowl.

"I know not this wrestling sport," he whispered to Khlit as he stripped off his shirt. "But there is no man in China who can overmatch me at hand-grips. Let this fat bullock look to his back, for I will break it for him."

Khlit watched his comrade with a troubled glance. Chagan was as powerful a man as he had ever seen, but Len Shi was weightier and moved with assurance, like one who had no doubt of his skill. Strong as the Tatar was, he might be no match for the Chinaman at the latter's game.

The Cossack took the two-handed sword from Chagan, allowing no one else to touch it, in spite of the fact that two of the soldiers offered readily to do so. The rest

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crowded around the silk square, talking eagerly with Len Shi, who made no response, but stared at Chagan, hands on his knees and slant eyes narrowed.

Khlit watched the two men as they faced each other on the silk, and glanced at the bland countenance of the officer. The latter showed no sign of interest in the bout, but Khlit felt that he had arranged it with a purpose.

The next instant the two wrestlers had locked arms and were swaying over the square. Len Shi's great face turned mottled with the effort he was making, and he roared with anger. Chagan made no sound, foiling the attempts of his adversary to trip him to the ground where Len Shi's greater weight would tell.

The soldiers crowded close to the two men, whose hot breaths rose in vapor through the cold air. The officer stroked his fan gently. Apparently he was not interested in the wrestlers, but Khlit saw that he watched them keenly. Len Shi had shifted his first hold to one more to his satisfaction, about the waist of Chagan who had locked the other's head in his mighty arms.

Len Shi, however, was a master of his craft. Twisting his head free from Chagan's grip, he swung the Tatar free of the ground. Following up his advantage he put forth his strength and tossed Chagan clear of the silk. The Tatar fell heavily on his back. A shout went up from the soldiers.

Chagan, however, was on his feet in an instant, snarling with rage. He sprang at Len Shi, only to be caught by the waist in the same grip that had thrown him off his feet before. Chagan, however, was not one to be tricked twice in the same manner.

As before, Len Shi swung the sword-bearer from his feet as if he had been a child. Khlit wondered at the smooth skill of the wrestler who could handle Chagan in this manner. Blood was running from the latter's mouth, for the fall had been a heavy one. Len Shi's wide chest was panting from his efforts and he was shouting shrilly in triumph.

Khlit saw Len Shi turn with the quickness of a cat and catch Chagan on his back. The Tatar was now athwart his opponent's broad shoulders, behind his neck in a horizontal position, with Len Shi's arms grasping his legs on one side and his neck on the other.

"See," said the officer to Khlit, "your man is like a trussed sheep. He is bleeding already, and he is helpless. Len Shi will presently cast him down and fall upon him. I have seen a dozen men crippled in this fashion. Len Shi is a master wrestler."

In truth, Chagan's arms were fumbling about Len Shi's bull-like head in seeming helplessness. Slowly the Chinaman began to turn with his burden as if to gain momentum for the effort that would hurl Chagan to the earth. The Tatar, however, was watching every move of his adversary.

With a shout Len Shi whirled. His arm about Chagan's legs shifted to the latter's neck with lightning quickness. His muscles bulged as he strained for the throw. At the same instant Khlit saw Chagan fling both arms under Len Shi's chin. As the latter flung the Tartar from him, Chagan's powerful arms twisted Len Shi's chin to one side.

Chagan flew through the air, wrenched loose from his hold. But Len Shi fell with him. Khlit heard a sound as of a rotten stick snapping in two. Chagan had fallen on his knees, spitting blood. But Len Shi lay full length beside him, with his limbs twisting in agony.

As the officer had predicted, Len Shi had thrown his foe. But Chagan had caught Len Shi's head, so that his full weight had jerked upon the Chinaman's spine. Len Shi's neck was broken.

"A clever trick, Uigur," the officer smiled blandly. "Len Shi has wrestled his last bout. But it was a Tatar trick. I suspected you and your follower. It will not be long before Len Shi is avenged."

The officer called sharply to his men, who were staring in wonder at the lifeless form of their comrade. Khlit had not been unprepared for such a move. He cast a quick glance around. They were in the middle of the street. The prisoners with the guard filled the street at one end. From the other side a group of horsemen were advancing. Escape by either end was cut off.

The doors of near-by buildings stood open, after the pillage of the night before. It might have been possible for Khlit to have gained one of the doorways while the soldiers were advancing on him. But Chagan was still on his knees, bleeding and dizzy from his fall and ignorant of the

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discovery of the officer. Khlit would not leave him.

Stepping to the side of the Tatar, he pulled him roughly to his feet and thrust the great sword into his hand.

"Stand, Chagan," he cried, "we are attacked!"

The Tatar grasped his weapon in both sinewy hands. But he was reeling from fatigue and dizziness. Khlit placed his back to Chagan and waited the onset of the Chinese with drawn sword. A grim smile twisted his white mustache. Truly, the odds were heavy. Twoscore against an old man and a tired warrior. Chagan, too, was naked of all protection, having doffed his quilted coat to wrestle. They had been cleverly tricked by the Chinese officer.

Khlit was facing the foot-soldiers who were advancing from the prisoners. Chagan was facing the horsemen who had pulled up barely in time to keep from running them down. He saw that the men in front of him spread out to surround Chagan and himself. This done, they waited.

Khlit gripped his sword impatiently. He would have preferred a quick onset to this. Then he caught sight of the Chinese officer and caught his breath in surprise. The man was down on his knees in the street, with his head bowed nearly to the earth.

Khlit cast a quick glance over his shoulder. Directly in front of Chagan was a horseman. His mount was caparisoned in silk with jade pendants. He wore a shining robe on which a dragon was embroidered. No armor was visible and his only weapon was a small sword with a jeweled hilt. The man was of lean build with a hawk-like face, nearly as dark as his black eyes.

Behind him a score of mailed lancers were drawn up, with a banner at their head. The banner bore a dragon. The man's hand was lifted as if to arrest the foot-soldiers who were around Khlit. As Khlit watched him he spoke quickly to the officer who was on his knees. Khlit could not understand what they said, but presently the rider turned to him.

"So we have a chess-player who is a Tatar, here," he said in a smooth voice. "I did not know the Tatars played the favorite game of the Dragon Emperor. A rare jewel I have found. Too precious to be thrown to these dogs of mine. Will you sheath your sword and come with Li Jusong, general of Wan Li, of the Dragon Throne?"

IX

KHLIT looked long into Li Jusong's impassive countenance. He was face to face at last with the famous general who had led victorious armies against the men of Japan and the Manchus in Korea. He pondered the latter's words. Khlit knew nothing of chess-play. He had taken the rôle as a safeguard in case he was questioned. What Li Jusong's purpose might be in sparing him he did not know.

It might be only a respite, but a respite was better than speedy death at the lances of the mailed riders. Khlit could see no course but to yield. He put little trust in the word of Li Jusong, but he preferred the society of the latter to the comrades of the dead Len Shi.

"Believe him not," whispered Chagan, "he has the tongue of a poisonous snake. Keep your sword, master. You and I will take many souls with us to the courts of Hades, as good Tatars should."

Khlit shook his head. He could see no good in resisting.

"Have I your word," he asked Li Jusong, "that I and my companion may keep our swords? And that we will be spared?"

"Aye, stranger," smiled Li Jusong, "so long as you are a chess-player."

In spite of Chagan's protest, Khlit sheathed his weapon. The Tatar scowled blackly at this. Khlit wondered as he saw the man lift his great sword and bring it down across his knee with all the strength of his arms. Chagan's two-handed sword snapped in twain and the giant cast the pieces from him.

"No other shall have this," he growled. "Lord, you have done ill."

Li Jusong regarded the sword-bearer curiously as Chagan stood beside Khlit with folded arms. His glance strayed to the curved sword of the Cossack and he frowned as if in an effort of memory. He motioned to two of his men to dismount.

"Ride with me," he directed Khlit briefly, "you and your man."

With that Li Jusong spurred forward his horse. The kneeling officer barely had time to spring to one side. The other riders closed in about them. They went onward

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through the blood-stained streets of Shankiang.

Chagan kept close to Khlit's side. Only once did he speak.

"You have done ill, lord," he repeated surlily.

Khlit made no response, and the two said no further word. Even when Li Jusong left them at the gate of the governor's palace which he had taken for his own quarters, and the horsemen led them to apartments in the rear where they sat down to a sumptuous meal plundered from the palace larder Chagan did not rouse from his reverie.

The soldiers left them here, with guards. Khlit sought out a bench and stretched full length upon it, for he was weary. In a moment he was asleep. Chagan however had not followed his example. The Tatar paced back and forth through the chamber, eying Khlit and the guards. His scarred face was black with anger.

X

In spite of tempest or drought or evil demons, the word of a wise man will come true.

—*Chinese Proverb.*

THAT night was the eighth night of the second moon, according to the chronicle of the *Kang Mu*, and Li Jusong had put to the sword many thousands of the populace of Shankiang. For two nights and a day his men had sacked the city. Thus, says the *Kang Mu*, the words of Li Chan Ko, the magician from the Imperial Throne, came to pass.

That night Khlit learned of the strange prophecy of Li Chan Ko. He had slept for several hours when his guards wakened him, and took him with Chagan to the presence of Li Jusong.

The general of Wan Li had spent the early part of the night in drinking with his followers in the court-room of the palace, an ornamented chamber, lacquered and tapestried, which had been spared pillage. Li Jusong was a man who trusted no one save Li Chan Ko, whom he held in great esteem. Consequently the two were alone with a few attendants when Khlit and Chagan were led to the long table where they sat. Four candles on the table lighted the room.

Li Jusong looked up at their entrance. His hard face was flushed from drinking and his black eyes seemed sunk in his head. He motioned Khlit to a seat on the other side of the table and scanned him covertly.

"The dogs and vultures are feasting high tonight in Shankiang, Tatar," he murmured, "for the city has felt the weight of the Dragon's claw. Like candles in the wind, the lives of its people are going out. Truly, it is as blind Li Chan Ko, in his wisdom, has said. Before we left the Great Wall he had foretold the destruction of the city. Harken, Tatar, and hear the words of wisdom."

The general turned to Li Chan Ko, a shriveled man in a scholar's dress, who wore the insignia of high caste. Khlit waited silently for what was to come.

"Li Chan Ko will repeat his prophecy," explained Li Jusong, sipping his wine, "and I will translate his golden phrases into your language."

The blind sage lifted his eyes and murmured. Khlit noted that the guards who stood beside Chagan bowed their heads as if at the words of a priest.

"This is the prophecy, O Tatar," resumed Li Jusong. "All unworthy, I shall try to repeat it for you—

"The wind whistles through the long night, where ghosts of the unburied dead wander in the gloom. The fading moon twinkles on the fallen snow. The fosses of the walls are frozen with blood, and the beards of the dead are stiff with ice. Each arrow is sped; every bowstring broken, and the strength of the war-horse is gone. Thus is the city of Shankiang on the coming of the Dragon Host."

"These words, Tatar," explained Li Jusong, "were written on the mind of the magician Li Chan Ko during sleep. Great is the wisdom of the magician!"

He emptied his wine-cup and stared at Khlit from reddened eyes. The scholar sat with folded hands, paying no heed to what went on. Khlit, from the corner of his eye, observed that two spearmen were close behind him. Plainly, Li Jusong remembered that Khlit still had his sword. The general clapped his hands and called to one of the attendants. The man disappeared and presently returned with an ivory chess-board inlaid with gold, which he set on the table between Khlit and Li Jusong.

"Now we will have a game, Tatar, you and I," smiled the Chinese. "It is a pretty set of chessmen, this, for it belonged to the

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governor himself before my men tied a silk bracelet around his neck and he sped to join his worthy ancestors."

Khlit did not look at the board. He had no knowledge of the game. He was watching Li Jusong. Was the man serious, or was he playing with his captives?

"Come, Tatar," said Li Jusong, "this is the pastime of kings. And here is wine. Drink, for wine is justly named the sweeper-away-of-care. Come, you are no common Tatar. I knew as much when I saw your sword drawn today."

Chagan gave a growl at this, but the general heeded him not. His glance challenged Khlit over the wine-cup, as the Cossack drank deeply. A smile played over his thin lips. Khlit set down his cup and motioned for more. The act gave him a chance to think. Li Jusong was playing with him. It was a game of wits, and Khlit had played at such many times. He smiled in answer to Li Jusong and drank again.

"You have good eyes, Li Jusong," he growled. "But this game of ivory puppets is not to my liking. It is a devil's pastime."

"Nevertheless," responded the general softly, "few can play it. Are you one of the few? I seem to doubt it. A wolf does not sport with toys."

Khlit looked up quickly. The other's face was expressionless, but the black eyes gleamed. It must have been chance that led Li Jusong to mention a wolf, the name that men applied to Khlit.

"You have called it the sport of kings, Li Jusong," he said slowly. "Yet kings play with greater stakes. Such as lives, and armies——"

"True!" The Chinese laughed quickly. "I am in a mood to humor you tonight, Tatar. We will play another game, with higher stakes. I knew that you were not a common man. That was why I spared you today."

With a sudden move he swept the chessmen from the board. The ivory images rolled scattering about the floor.

"That is how I scatter my enemies," he smiled, "wherever I meet them."

He called to his attendants. One of the men left the room, and in a moment a door opened and several men came into the chamber, bowing before Li Jusong.

One or two were soldiers of rank, but the others wore the robes of ceremony that stamped them as courtiers. The leader of the party halted close to the table with another bow. Something in the man's broad yellow face stirred Khlit's memory. He heard an exclamation from Chagan. The man was Cho Kien, the eunuch who had come to the Tatar khans as envoy.

"I see you know our visitor already," observed Li Jusong, "Cho Kien is high in favor at the Dragon Throne. He once bore you a message which was not delivered in full, owing to the presence of your undesirable companions. Cho Kien with his comrades of the Lily returned to Shankiang, following my instructions, and he recognized you while he was passing through the streets in a sedan."

Khlit recalled the meeting between himself and Chagan and the official of the Lily in a curtained vehicle. He made no reply, waiting for what was to come.

"Cho Kien, who was kind enough to open one of the gates to my cavalry," went on Li Jusong, "told me of your presence in the city, and I issued orders that you were to be spared and brought to me. For it was the wish of the Dragon Emperor, who is lofty as the clouds of heaven, that the message be delivered to you."

XI

CHO KIEN stepped forward at a sign from the general.

"It is written," he said in his high voice, "to kill not the ox that tills your garden. The World Honored One, in his graciousness, has received knowledge of Khlit, the strange warrior who defeated Hang-Hi. Nevertheless, not he but the Tatar khans are the enemies of the Dragon Throne. Khlit, who bears the name of the Wolf is not a Tatar by birth. He is a wanderer of great skill in warfare, from a distant country. His curved sword is a charm that brings victory to the side on which he fights."

The eunuch paused to glance keenly at Khlit. The latter was not surprised at this information, for it had been revealed to the councilors of Hang-Hi, some of whom must have escaped the massacre that followed the defeat of his army.

"The part of my message which was written on the paper I bore, and which was for the ear of Khlit alone, is this," pursued Cho Kien. "The paper was taken

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from me by one of the khans, but I remember its wording. The Gracious Emperor, Wan Li, convinced that only magic of high quality could have defeated so brave a man as Hang-Hi has been pleased, on the advice of his wise men, to offer pardon to the warrior Khlit if he will use his magical power on the side of Wan Li against the rebel khans."

Li Jusong cast a shrewd glance at Khlit. "It is the wish of Wan Li whom may long life and honor bless that you be given a high command under me and hereditary rank. You shall have ten thousand men under you and a voice in all the councils. You are not born a Tatar. The cause of the khans is lost. The sun of Wan Li rises bright over all China." He paused to empty his cup. "You will do well to accept the offer that will give you life."

"And what if I refuse?" asked Khlit slowly.

"Then to my sorrow I shall be forced to have you beaten to death as a traitor with split bamboos in seven days, when the sack of Shankiang is ended. It would be brainless to choose death. I have seen the writing on your sword which signifies high descent. You have seen the power of the Dragon. The khans expect me to attack them at the Kerulon. But I shall wait here until they quarrel among themselves and the Horde disbands. Spies have told me that the khans are on ill terms with each other."

Cho Kien nodded confirmation to this. Khlit stared at the scattered chessmen on the floor in silence. Li Jusong was a shrewd general. He had discovered the weak point of the Jun-gar Horde. United, the warlike khans might offer stern resistance. Separately, they could be cut down. Khlit was a wanderer, who had fought with many armies. He was not a Tatar, although of Tatar blood. Allied with Li Jusong he might win high favor from the Dragon.

He filled his cup and drank deep. Li Jusong took this as a good omen and did likewise, bidding Cho Kien and the men of the Lily be seated.

"These are the men, O Khlit," he smiled, "who are sworn to carry fire and sword into Tartary. If you refuse our offer they will see that you die slowly. Think well!"

At this the aged scholar, Li Chan Ko, leaned forward and placed under Li Jusong's eyes a paper on which he had been tracing characters with a brush.

"The blind man of wisdom has a word for you," said the general, holding a candlestick over the paper, for the light was dim. "He reminds you of the words of the Dragon Emperor to the khans, the saying—'With the slayer of his kin a man may not live under the same sky.' "

Khlit wondered as he watched the bland face of the blind man what the latter had meant by the sentence. Later he was to know more of the wisdom of Li Chan Ko. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Chagan standing by the door with drooping head. The sword-bearer had heard what had passed. Khlit remembered that the latter had chosen to die rather than to trust Li Jusong.

He had only to say a word of agreement and he would be safe. Chagan doubtless would be slain with dispatch, and there would be no Tatar witness to his decision. The khans had refused Khlit his rightful rank among them. Jealous and intolerant of each other, they seemed bound to fall before Li Jusong's sword.

With Li Jusong he would hold a high rank. Weary of wandering alone Khlit would have honor and a place of command. If he chose, he might not need to face the Tatars—might go into another part of China.

As he meditated his glance fell on his sword. The curved sword that had been his companion through life bore the inscription of Kaidu, the White Khan. The blood of the White Khans ran in Khlit's veins. Moreover he had fought with the khans of the Kerulon—had shared their bread and wine. They had followed him in battle.

"Li Jusong," he said slowly, "tell me this thing. Is the man who betrays another to be trusted?"

"Nay, but you will betray no one. The khans have given you no place with them."

"Then," Khlit responded, "how is he to be trusted who asks one man to betray another?"

The old scholar, Li Chan Ko, turned his blind eyes to Khlit. He smiled approvingly, as if he had understood. Cho Kien spoke, his voice heavy with distrust.

"Your answer—what is it to be?"

Khlit stood up. The others did likewise, save Li Chan Ko. The dim light from the four candles showed Chagan's burning

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glance fixed on him from among the guards at the door. Khlit pointed to him.

"I would speak with the Tatar first," he said firmly.

Li Jusong and Cho Kien glanced at each other briefly. The former nodded.

"Bring the Tatar to the table," he called to the guards. "He will be safer here."

The guards escorted Chagan forward, leaving the door vacant. The two behind Khlit stepped to his side watchfully. The men of the Lily muttered, and drew closer.

Chagan's questioning glance was on Khlit as the latter stepped close to his side.

"I give Chagan a farewell word," said Khlit briefly.

For a long moment he leaned close to the sword-bearer's ear and whispered. The latter's sullen eyes opened wide in astonishment. Cho Kien motioned to the guards impatiently, but Khlit stepped back to the table, resting both hands on it. He smiled grimly.

"This is my answer, Li Jusong," he said slowly. His hands tightened on the table. "Aye, my blood is noble—it is that of the White Khans. I keep faith with my blood —thus!"

A heave of his lean arms, and the table crashed over on its side. The candles fell with the flagon of wine and the goblets. The spilled wine extinguished the candles. A shout went up from the Chinese. The chamber was in darkness.

"The door, Chagan!" Khlit's voice rang out.

He heard the sword-bearer's answering shout, and the crash of bodies on the floor. A heavy weight descended on his head, and he sank forward over the table. A haze fell upon his mind.

XII

WHEN consciousness returned to Khlit he found himself chained to a pillar by the arms in a lacquered chamber. Beside him were white-robed bodies of dead Buddhist priests. He was in the room in the rear of the temple through which he had passed before.

Daylight showed Khlit the interior of the chamber. Narrow windows high in the wall at his back let in the light. The walls were of black ebony and teakwood. The single door was also of teakwood and very strong.

The place seemed to have been a council room for the monks of the temple. It was littered with discarded robes, books and chairs. The cold was piercing, but it served to lessen the stench of the bodies. And for seven days Khlit endured the cold and hunger of the place, for Cho Kien, who tended him, gave him only rice and water.

Khlit knew that the massacre was still going on in the streets of Shankiang, for at intervals shots and cries reached his ears. Footsteps passed the adjoining corridors, but no one entered the chamber. Only Cho Kien came, to mock him.

The eunuch told him nothing of the fate of Chagan. He forced captive priests in white robes to minister to Khlit, at the point of the sword. Even if the sword-bearer had escaped from the palace there was little chance of winning free from the walled city where the swords of Li Jusong were reaping a deadly harvest. For a week the sound of slaying continued.

Khlit's situation gave him small food for hope. His arms long since had become numb from the cold and the ropes. He could sleep only at intervals, sitting against the pillar. His sword had disappeared from his belt, but he saw it strapped to Cho Kien.

The first night had convinced him that there was no loosening his bonds. And Cho Kien's vigilance prevented his speaking to the priests, even if they could have understood him. There was nothing to do but struggle to keep his blood stirring under the grip of the cold, and ward off with his boots the rats that came to gnaw the dead bodies.

The Cossack had long ceased to count the days. He was weak from hardships and lack of food. He had spoken no word for a week. His eyes were sunken in his head and his chest burned with fever. The rats had nearly finished the meat from the bodies in the corner and were becoming bolder in their attacks on him. Especially when he slept did they torment him.

Khlit's memory suffered from the week of imprisonment. Two things, however, were clear in his mind. He longed to regain possession of his curved sword. And he desired to slay Cho Kien, who openly rejoiced in his ownership of the valuable weapon.

It did not occur to Khlit to beg for mercy

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of his captor or to alter his decision concerning the missive of Wan Li. The Cossack had never asked mercy of men, and his pride was invincible.

It was late on the seventh night—he had seen the glimmer of a pale moon on the floor at his feet—when Khlit came face to face with Li Chan Ko, the magician. That night he beheld something of the strange power of the man whose wisdom was feared by Li Jusong and by Wan Li, the Dragon Emperor.

So quietly had Li Chan Ko come into the chamber that Khlit was not aware of him until the blind man moved into the square of moonlight that lay beneath one of the windows. The teak door had not opened, and Khlit knew that Cho Kien had the only key to it, yet he saw the yellow robe of the scholar advancing toward him.

Khlit shook his head savagely, for he thought the fever was tricking him. He saw that Li Chan Ko's eyes were closed and that he moved slowly, leaning on his staff. The wizened face of the old man was calm. He had come from the corner where the dead men lay, but abreast of Khlit he paused. Li Chan Ko turned directly to him and Khlit shuddered as he saw the eyes of the blind man open, as if seeking him.

"Once," said Li Chan Ko, "I heard you answer a question, strange warrior whom men call Khlit. It was wisely answered as if the spirit of Confucius himself had told you what to say. A noble mind is the highest form of virtue. Little do we take with us into the world of things that are not, yet a noble spirit is with us in our last hour."

The words of the scholar, in Tatar, were soft and as he spoke he smiled. This was no fever. Li Chan Ko was blind. Yet he spoke as if he saw Khlit. A shudder went through the Cossack.

"The city of Shankiang is an evil place," went on the magician, "and those who do not know say that hobgoblins and ill-omened foxes infest the citadel. Li Jusong is one of these, for he slew fifty thousand in the houses that my prophecy might be fulfilled. Yet in my dream of stricken Shankiang I saw snow over the streets and there has been no snow. The prophecy is not yet fulfilled."

Khlit spoke in a voice harsh from suffering.

"Li Chan Ko," he asked, "how did you come here?"

"I came," said the blind man, "because I dreamed last night that the Rakchas took the soul of a man in this room, and that he ascended on the dragon. I heard them say that you were kept here, and that Cho Kien would come tonight to beat you with a bamboo cudgel until your body was broken. I would help you if I could."

"Then loosen my bonds," whispered Khlit eagerly, "and put a sword in my hand."

Li Chan Ko shook his head with a slow smile.

"What is to be, will be," he responded, "and who am I to interfere with the workings of Heaven? Nay, I came through a corridor that leads to the closet behind the bodies of the dead men. Cho Kien had told me of the place, which he learned from his slaves, the priests of the temple. Cho Kien has profaned the temple with murder, which is ill."

Khlit mastered his disappointment with an effort.

"Was Chagan, my follower, slain?" he inquired, for the blind man seemed to have heard all that took place.

"Nay, I think not," Li Chan Ko shook his head slowly. "That night your man broke through his guards and escaped. I think he must have left the city, for Li Jusong said that Chagan had been seen in the Tower of the Five Falcons with the archer who still holds the tower."

Khlit pondered this. Chagan had escaped, without knowing what had happened to his master. The Tatar might have made every effort to find him; but how was he to do so? Probably he had concluded that Khlit was already dead. If what Li Chan Ko said was true, his life was to be taken that night. Cho Kien was prepared to end his imprisonment.

"Will you give me a sword?" he said. "Or break against the pillar the blade of the curved sword the eunuch wears? Better that than to be sullied by the hands of Cho Kien."

Again the blind man shook his head gently.

"I am not a meddler with fate. What I have foretold will come to pass. I have not strength to break the sword or to take it from Cho Kien. Harken, there is Cho Kien, with his men, at the door."

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The blind man turned his head as if listening to sounds which Khlit could not hear. For the second time the Cossack shuddered. Li Chan Ko seemed to him to be one of the Rakchas themselves—evil spirits of purgatory. When he looked up again, the magician had drawn back against the wall. He was nearly concealed now by the shadows.

Khlit heard the familiar sound of the door grating on its hinges. He caught a glimpse of several spearmen who bore torches outside the door. Cho Kien with one priest advanced into the room, and closed the heavy door upon his attendants. In his hand the eunuch held a steel-tipped flail of bamboo.

The priest carried a torch.

XIII

OLD Li Chan Ko had drawn further from the pillar and Cho Kien did not see him as he stepped in front of Khlit, his narrow eyes gleaming, the curved sword at his fat middle. The priest stood near, watching them. The man's face stirred Khlit's memory.

"Li Jusong has said," Cho Kien whispered, "that your death must come this night. His men are weary of slaying, and I have come with the flail, to carry out the command of my master, Wan Li. Soon you will no longer kick away the rats."

"I saved your life at the Tatar camp, Cho Kien," said Khlit grimly, "and you have this in payment for me. If you were a true man you would free me and give me my sword. I am weak and you would risk little. Should a man of noble blood be beaten to death like a servant?"

"Nay," grinned the eunuch, "I have heard tales of that sword of yours. I shall wear it, for it bears the inscription of a Tatar hero."

At Cho Kien's command the priest stepped nearer with the torch. The Cossack eyed his sword longingly. Truly, Chagan had been wise when he said it was better to face the Chinese weapons than trust to their good faith.

"Are you going to leave me tied to the pillar?" he said. "Aye, the devil has planted fear in your heart, Cho Kien. Before your birth you were a woman, and when you are born again, it will be as a jackal."

The eunuch snarled angrily, the whites of his eyes showing. He laid aside his long robe and stepped close to Khlit, who laughed in his face.

"Dog," mocked the Cossack, "one without honor! Aye, the name of dog is too good for you, for a dog is faithful——"

"To his master," cried the eunuch shrilly. "It is the word of Wan Li, monarch of the earth and dispenser of life and death that I am obeying. You shall die more slowly for those words. The torch will burn the soles of your feet until you bellow like a dying ox!"

"The torture will not make me cry, jackal. But to die at the hand of such as you—I would that I had let the Tatars drive home the nails into your ears. Then they would be less apt for spying."

Cho Kien held the flail before Khlit.

"Your head shall be sent to the Tatar camp, Khlit," he cried. "With a tale of how you whimpered under the lash and begged Cho Kien to let you live as a slave. I searched for you long, Tatar Wolf, in the city after I saw you in the crowd. I learned that you had been seen at the house of Wen Shu, the candle-maker, and I went thither. You had gone, so I exacted penalty on the family of the candle-maker."

"Nay, Cho Kien, they were dead."

The eunuch laughed shrilly.

"We tore their jewels from their clothes and cut down the bodies of the women, for Wen Shu had fled. Then we threw them into the street, to be food for dogs, and offal under horses' feet!"

Khlit heard a sound behind Cho Kien, and thought that Li Chan Ko had spoken. The magician, however, was silent in the shadows. The eunuch turned to the priest with a snarl and took the torch which he waved in front of the Cossack's face. The priest stepped nearer as if to see what was to happen.

As he did so Khlit had a good glimpse of the man's face. In spite of the shaven head and the white robe, he knew that he had seen the man. The latter was breathing heavily as if from excitement. He stretched out his hand toward Cho Kien.

Khlit closed his eyes for an instant as the torch singed his face. As he opened them he caught the gleam of steel. He saw the priest withdraw the sword from the scabbard at Cho Kien's side. He read burning hatred in the man's convulsed face.

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Then the blade swung aloft and descended upon the eunuch's neck.

The evil eyes of Cho Kien opened wide in pain. He wavered on his feet for an instant. Then the torch dropped to the floor. With a shudder Cho Kien sank to his knees. The priest hacked and stabbed at his frame as if possessed of a demon. Then Khlit remembered where he had seen the man before. It was Wen Shu, in the dress of a Buddhist monk.

There had been no sound, save the fall of the torch and the guards had not been alarmed. Khlit's heart gave a bound as he saw the dead Cho Kien. He whispered to Wen Shu to free him. He raised his voice, but the candle-maker was standing over the slain eunuch, with eyes for nothing but the blood which spotted Cho Kien's elegant dress. It had been an evil moment when Cho Kien had boasted of his visit to the shop of Wen Shu.

Then the form of Li Chan Ko made its appearance beside Wen Shu. The candle-maker started back in alarm as he saw the blind man. He made no move to attack the other, however. All his rage had been spent on the eunuch.

"Where is Cho Kien?" asked the magician of Khlit.

"Dead," said Khlit grimly. "Your dream has come true, Li Chan Ko."

The blind man closed his eyes as if in thought. Then he stretched out his hand toward Khlit. He spoke softly to Wen Shu, and the latter unbound the Cossack's arms.

"One man has died," said Li Chan Ko to Khlit, "and you need not remain, now that the prophecy is fulfilled. Lead me out by the closet door."

Khlit groaned with the effort of moving his arms. With the assistance of Wen Shu, he buckled his belt around his waist, and replaced the sword in its sheath. The candle-maker, who was now trembling with fear of what he had done, took up the torch and by its light Khlit was able to lead Li Chan Ko to the narrow door through which the magician had come. As he passed from the gloomy chamber he heard the skurrying of many tiny feet over the floor. The rats were hurrying toward the body of Cho Kien.

XIV

The wind is swift, but swifter is a Tatar horse. A fool will ask thee why, but the wise man knows that it is because a Tatar wears no spurs. His horse is one with himself.

—*The Kang Mu.*

ARSLAN the archer nodded with sleep. He was weary with watching on the summit of the Tower of the Five Falcons. Since the last of his comrades had been slain by musket shots from the wall below, Arslan had had little sleep. He lay prone on the battlements of the tower, where he could make out in the moonlight sentries moving back and forth on the wall below him, out of reach of his arrows.

The Tower of the Five Falcons was the highest in the city of Shankiang. It topped the city wall against which it was built by some thirty feet. It had been designed as a watch tower, and was a scant dozen feet in width, with a narrow door opening on the ground, and slits for windows on each of its five stories.

Had the tower been built against the wall Arslan might have escaped before this by a rope made from the coats of his dead comrades. But the distance of a man's height separated wall and tower and the Manchu archer had chosen to remain in his stronghold rather than run the gantlet of the watchers who were posted around, waiting for starvation to bring him forth.

Arslan nodded with sleep. But ever as he heard a sound below him he wakened and fitted arrow to bowstring. He had sent many Chinese speeding to their ancestors and his enemies had prudently left him unmolested for the past week, but Arslan was wary and vigilant. Moreover, although the other defenders of the tower were dead, a half-dozen helmets showed around the battlements of the summit. At intervals these helmets changed their position, revealing portions of mail under them and spear-points which were a target for arrows of the besiegers.

The moon was bright overhead, and Arslan yawned, stroking his black mustache. All at once he sat up alertly. He had heard footsteps in the square underneath, and a shout. In an instant he was peering over the side, with raised bow. He saw a figure run from the shadows of the buildings into the cleared space under the tower. The figure approached the door of the tower, climbing over the dead men, and Arslan wondered. For it was a single, tall man. sword in hand, who did not

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look like a Chinese. As it reached the door the figure called up to him.

"A Tatar comes to the tower, Arslan," it growled. "Let me in, for I am followed."

Suspicious of treachery, Arslan scanned the newcomer, arrow poised. Truly, the man looked like a Tatar. And Arslan saw arrows flicker out of the shadows, to rattle against the stones of the tower.

"What is your name, Tatar?" he cried.

"Khlit, the chess-player, of the southern gate. Do you remember Chagan, the wrestler——"

Arslan cast down his bow.

"Aye, Tatar," he called cheerily, "Chagan was a true man. He said he would live to fling my carcass over the wall. Instead of that he flung over his own. Climb in the door. It is blocked by stinking bodies and a heap of masonry, but there is an opening at the top that leads in, over the pile——"

Khlit dived within the door as a new volley of arrows sought him out. Arslan discharged a shaft or two at the shadows and a cry told him that he had aimed well. The arrows ceased. Presently he heard the sound of steps on the stone stairs that led to the summit, and a shadow emerged that took the figure of the tall Cossack.

"Bend that tall head of yours, uncle," grunted Arslan, "or it will be a rare target for the sly cutthroats yonder. Welcome to the Tower of the Five Falcons. Did I not say it was proof against the host of Li Jusong! Chagan was here a few days ago, but he said you were kept in the gilt bird-cage of Li Jusong's palace."

Khlit dropped to the stone flags, breathing heavily, and moving his cramped arms painfully. He caught sight of the dozen silent watchers of the tower and pointed to them inquiringly. Arslan chuckled under his mustache.

"My good warriors, uncle," he whispered. "Such warriors have never been seen before. Their flesh is the coats of my dead comrades; their bones are spears. Arrows harm them not—and give me more shafts for my bow. Although I collect plenty from the quivers of the dogs lying at the door. And they ask not for food—although I saw to it before I took command of the tower that it was well stocked with wine and dried meat. Ho! I am glad to have a comrade. It has been ill watching alone."

Khlit scanned the archer keenly. Arslan's eyes were haggard. His helmet was dented by a cross-bow bolt, the leather gauntlet on his left arm was stained with blood. But his hardy spirit shone in his black eyes. Khlit's heart leaped at being with a comrade again and out in the clear air, after the fetid room of the temple. A swallow of wine, drunk from Arslan's helmet, and a mouthful of meat sent the blood stirring in his veins again.

"They will be after you presently, uncle," grinned Arslan, eying the shadows. "Li Jusong will hear of your arrival at the tower, and will whip his dogs to the attack. My warriors will not aid us much, I fear. Aye, it will be warm work. Chagan told me that Cho Kien was sharpening his knife for you."

Khlit drew his curved sword and ran his thumb along its edge lovingly.

"Cho Kien is food for the rats," he said grimly. "How did you meet with Chagan?"

Arslan peered over the rampart cautiously. A musket shot greeted his appearance.

"Ho! The dogs are giving tongue," he cried; "soon they will run in for the kill. Why, Chagan came to me as you did, but without his great sword. He was eager to be over the walls, and so like a fool he leaped to the wall from the tower. It was a desperate chance. The night was dark and the sentries saw him not. He had my twisted rope around his middle. One end of it I held here while he lowered himself down on the outside of the wall.

"I think his leg was broken, for he limped as he rose after his fall. No one but an iron brute such as he could have done it. He must have got free in spite of his hurt, for I saw him not the next morning. Many horses were loose on the plain and he may have caught one."

The archer gave a warning hiss and caught Khlit by the shoulder.

"The dogs are astir, uncle," he whispered. "Go you and stand at the top of the stone heap inside the door. If any of the vermin escape my shafts, shave their skulls for them with that long sword of yours."

Khlit hastened down the narrow stairs to the lower story, where he took up his stand on the summit of the pile of stones that Arslan and his comrades had torn from the floors above to form a rampart behind the door.

He saw at a glance the strength of the

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place, that had enabled a few men to stand off the attacks of many. The door was scarce a yard in width, and the stones formed a barrier inside to the height of a tall man. The entrance was choked with bodies, and barely wide enough to permit two men to come in at a time.

He placed himself where he could see through the door. A thin stream of moonlight came in, but the top of the stone heap where he stood was in darkness. Khlit was weary, but the prospect of battle refreshed him. He sat down calmly, lighting his pipe, and waited. A sound from the top of the tower caught his ear.

It was the soft note of a lute. A second later he heard Arslan's voice lifted in song.

"Where the Fox athwart is lying,
And the moonbeams hang,
They hunt—the pack is dying—
These men of Wang."

He heard arrows strike against the stone of the tower, but the song did not falter.

"A sound of music lulls them,
To the Serpent's fang.
Alas! The sweet lute gulls them—
My men of Wang."

The next moment footsteps pattered across the square in front of the tower. Khlit heard a cry of pain, and a heavy fall. He sprang to his feet and peered down at the entrance. He saw a man fall bodily into it, and lie writhing, an arrow sticking from his shoulders. A hand appeared and jerked the body aside.

Khlit saw a Chinese warrior clamber through the door and start up the heap of stones. The man held a pike before him, and peered anxiously ahead of him. He did not see Khlit who stepped to one side softly, avoiding the pike.

The next instant the man fell prone. A stroke of the curved sword had severed his head cleanly from his body. Khlit caught the pike as it was sliding down the stones. With it he pushed the body back into the door. A second man appeared, climbing over the body of the first.

Khlit shortened the pike and waited until the man was up to him. A quick thrust and the second warrior followed the first. He heard Arslan's voice above the clamor outside.

"To my chant they sing the chorus,
And wo they sang.
They fall in their blood before us—
Dead men of Wang!"

Two of the attackers essayed the entrance together, crowding each other and helpless in the dark. Khlit's spear felled one of the two, and the other crawled back hastily. The door was now choked with bodies. No further effort was made to clear it.

For some time there were shouts outside and on the wall beside the tower. Khlit waited with ears strained. The shouts died away and he could hear men running from the tower. Silence followed, broken by Arslan's shout of triumph.

"Ho, there, uncle of the curved sword! Come to the tower. The hunt has ended for tonight."

XV

KHLIT found Arslan filling his helmet at the wine cask on the roof of the tower. The Manchu was spitting blood from a cut through his cheek where an arrow had glanced, but he grinned as he saw the Cossack. He pointed to where dawn was showing in the east. A cold wind whipped across the tower, and a few snowflakes fell between them.

"A warm skirmish, and a cold dawn, uncle," said the Manchu, wiping his mouth after the wine, and offering his helmet to Khlit. "How liked you my song? I play my lute day and night for these dogs of ours—and to keep awake. It brings me a rare harvest of arrows. Would that Chagan was here to see that skirmish. He was a rare drinker of wine. The cask is near empty."

Khlit seated himself and wrapped his coat close about him. The snowflakes were the beginning of a storm which presently began to whiten the tower. There was little satisfaction in Khlit's heart. A second attack on the tower with ladders might prove successful. Two men could not hold it long against odds. And there was no escape. He could not hope to leap thirty feet to the wall as Chagan had done, even if there had been a second rope.

"Where went Chagan?" he asked shortly.

"To his people, no doubt," responded Arslan indifferently, sitting close to Khlit and wrapping himself in his fur cloak. "We can rest for a while, uncle. The men

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of Wang may leave us in peace now, for the troops are drunk with pillage. You and I are too small game for them to bother about. Aye, the Tatar was in a hurry to carry some message he bore. His mission here was ended."

"How was that?" growled Khlit. "Speak, minstrel without wits!"

"Nay," objected Arslan, "my song was witty indeed. Why was his mission ended? Well, it is a long tale in the telling. Chagan was sent after you by the Tatar khans when they found you were leaving the camp. It seems they trusted you not."

Khlit looked up impatiently, and something in his eye made Arslan hasten on, more seriously.

"I meant no offense, comrade. Chagan told me the tale, and it is not in the brute to lie. It seems that a certain fat eunuch, Cho Kien, upon whom may the rats hold high festival, came to the khans with a missive from Wan Li, demanding your person. So much he read. The rest the khans read for themselves, for Cho Kien left the script behind him in his haste to get away with a whole skin.

"Wan Li offered you a post in his army and high honor. When you left secretly, refusing aid and escort from the khans, some were suspicious. So Chagan was sent to accompany you and leave you not on penalty of having his hide ripped."

Khlit made no reply. He recalled the first meeting with the sword-bearer and how he had thought it strange that the man had left Hotai Khan, his master. So the jealousy of the khans had followed him into China.

"If you yielded to Li Jusong," went on Arslan, "and took the place that was offered you, Chagan was to slay you and stick your head on a spear in front of your tent. If you did not bargain with the Chinese, and remained true to the Tatars who seemed to think you one of them in blood—although you look not like a Tatar to me—Chagan was to serve you faithfully and bring the news to the khans. I know not why they take such an interest in you."

Khlit smiled grimly as he thought of the *kurultai* in the forest. Truly, the khans had debated much about him. Chagan had not told Arslan of Khlit's rank, or of the curved sword of Kaidu.

"Was that all the tale?" he asked.

"That was all—save that Chagan said the khans had assembled this side of the Kerulon to watch the movements of Li Jusong. They have all of their power there, with additional parties of Tungusi and Manchus—my comrades. Would I were at the Kerulon camp, four days' march from here, and not on top of this cursed tower. You have the bearing and speech of one accustomed to command, uncle. What is your name and people?"

"I am a Cossack. My name is Khlit."

Arslan yawned and stretched.

"A Cossack? I have not heard of that horde. Chagan must have lied when he said you were a Tatar. At all events, you fight well, and that is enough."

Khlit, who had been pondering, turned to Arslan moodily.

"Think you the khans will march east?" he asked.

"Nay," Arslan growled sleepily, "how do I know? They will quarrel among themselves, more like, and waste their power in feuds. Such is their way. When they have a leader as they had at Altai Haiten, they are invincible——"

"Li Jusong is a shrewd general," debated Khlit. "He will not move from Shankiang to attack the khans, for he knows that they will quarrel."

Khlit's head dropped on his chest. He was well content to have the khans know from Chagan of the reply he had made to Li Jusong. Since they had set a man to watch him, it was well that they should know he had been faithful to them—to the blood of his ancestor. He recalled Chagan's misgivings when he had come to Shankiang with grim amusement. Truly, the sword-bearer had had some grounds for his suspicion.

A movement on the part of Arslan caused Khlit to turn suddenly. The archer was wide awake now, and in his face was a look of wonder. His hand was stretched out toward Khlit's sword, fingers touching the hilt. Instinctively the Cossack struck down the archer's hand. Arslan drew back, but there was no anger in his face.

"Pardon," he said, "I did not mean ill. The sun is up—and I saw the hilt of your sword for the first time. It is like the swords of the White Khans. Does it—is it yours? Was it your father's?"

"Aye," said Khlit shortly, for he was busy with his own thoughts. "It is my sword, and my father's father's."

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He remained sunk in musing, but Arslan arose presently. Removing his cloak, the Manchu laid it over Khlit, propping it against the stone rampart so as to keep the snow from him. When Khlit looked up at this, Arslan bent down on one knee.

"You need sleep, master, for you are weary. I will watch." He looked up anxiously. "If my tongue has given offense, slay me. I spoke in folly, not knowing who you were."

So Arslan took up his watch on the Tower of the Five Falcons. And presently, through the falling snow he saw the figure of a mounted man opposite the walls. The rider was some distance away, only partly visible in the storm. Other horsemen appeared beside him.

Arslan knew that parties of Li Jusong's men were scattered over the outlaying districts in pillage. But these were different. He could see their pointed helmets and lances behind their backs. As he watched they wheeled their horses and vanished.

XVI

KHLIT slept soundly. Worn out from his week in the temple he lay quiet while the snow piled up on the tower. Little by little, however, he began to be aware of an increasing clamor under him. His dreams were disturbed by the sound of horses galloping, and trumpets. He stirred and sat up, pushing aside the fur cloak that Arslan had stretched over him.

By the position of the sun he saw that he had slept away half the day. The snow had ceased and the plain around Shankiang with the roads and outlying houses visible from the top of the tower were carpeted with white. Khlit groaned as he sat up, for his body ached from cold. He saw Arslan sitting near him, stringing his bow, and sorting out his arrows. The archer was humming to himself.

"The swords will be a-shining
And bow-strings twang,
Where the banners are entwining
These men of Wang."

Khlit sprang to his feet and looked down at the walls of Shankiang. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes with an oath. Surely a change had taken place in the city. Across the square under the tower squadrons of horse were galloping in haste. An uproar resounded in the streets. Chinese infantry were running up the stone steps leading to the summit of the walls and taking their stations along the battlements.

"What is this?" growled Khlit. "Why did you not waken me?"

"Sleep was best, lord," responded the Manchu, "for soon we shall need all our wits. Aye, the Dragon is rousing itself from its drunken sleep of the past week. Look!"

He pointed to the northern gate which was visible at some distance from the tower. A horde of horsemen were rushing through the doors, a motley crowd of soldiers, along the road where Khlit and Chagan had come to the city. As Khlit watched, he saw the massive gates close, shutting out the fugitives. A wail arose from the horsemen barred from the city.

What did this mean? The city was alarmed, and the Chinese were assembling on the walls. They had closed the gates hastily, shutting out some of their own men. Khlit cast a keen glance over the streets. He saw that confusion reigned.

"The sentinels were dozing.
To arms they sprang!
The toils are fast enclosing
Our men of Wang!"

Thus Arslan chanted. As he did so he pointed out over the plains. Khlit drew in his breath sharply. In the distance a dark mass was moving toward Shankiang. Spears glinted in the sun. Along the high-road a second mass was advancing at a rapid pace. By the bank of a river a third body was moving. Over a hill to the west still another dark line was flooding down the slope toward the walls. Banners were to be seen in the midst of the oncoming hordes, which were composed of horsemen. Even at the distance he recognized the banners.

"The khans have left the Kerulon," he said to Arslan. "They must have met and defeated the detachments of Li Jusong which were out in the country."

"Aye," responded the archer with a chuckle, "now we will see, you and I, lord, the Dragon penned in its lair. The hunters are the hunted. Either a miracle has come to pass, or the khans have learned how Li Jusong's men were scattered in pillage and

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have come to strike before the Dragon can prepare to defend the city."

XVII

OLD in the ways of battle, Khlit noted the events that took place within the walls with a critical eye. During the next few hours he saw every detail of the tableau that was spread before him. And he wondered at what he saw.

The Chinese had been taken by surprise. Plainly the Tatars had succeeded, as was their custom, in cutting off the outlying troops before warning could reach the city. The mounted columns of the khans had not paused in their advance, and Li Jusong had barely had time to close the gates of Shankiang and order his men to the walls. The snow-storm had formed a screen for the movements of the khans during the last few hours. And the Chinese forces were disorganized by the sack of Shankiang.

So much Khlit reasoned to himself. He saw, however, that the walls of the city were high, and that cannon were ranged at intervals between the towers. The defenders were hurrying to the ramparts and crowding around the cannon. The uproar was incessant.

"It will take weeks for cannon to breach these walls," he shouted to Arslan above the confusion. "And there are no traitors in the city to open a gate, as when Li Jusong besieged the place."

Arslan paused in sorting his arrows long enough to stare curiously at Khlit.

"Have you ever seen your khans storm a city, lord? Nay, I think not. They have little use for cannon. From the time of Genghis Khan they have attacked a walled city in one way and one way only. Soon you will see how it is done. The Chinese know the manner of it. See—they are squealing about the cannon like a herd of cattle."

Khlit leaned on the battlement of the tower and surveyed the Tatar forces which had advanced within easy gunshot of the walls. The foremost columns had paused to wait for the others to reach their line. The troops were mainly horsemen, with bowmen and others clinging to their stirrups.

The column directly opposite the Tower of the Five Falcons was headed by the banner of the Chakars. That advancing by the highway bore the Kallmark standard. Khlit thought that the horsemen by the river carried the Hoshot banner, of Chepé Buga, the lean veteran of a hundred battles. There were other banners which he could not make out, but which were familiar to Arslan.

"Look!" cried the archer. "There is the Tungusi standard—from the mountains of the north. Aye, and there is the banner of my brother Manchu archers, from the highlands of Manchuria. Now there will be rare arrow work. Li Jusong will be begging a happy omen from Li Chan Ko, his magician, for here is all the Tatar power."

Khlit made no response. He was spell-bound by the sight before him. The Tatar host was greater than the army he had seen at the Kerulon. Each column must have contained twenty thousand warriors. There were five columns. The strength of Li Jusong, Khlit had heard, consisted of two hundred thousand men. But a good portion of these had been slain in the sack of the city. More had been caught beyond the walls. He saw the crowd of men outside the gate clamoring for admittance. In the face of the Tatar host the Chinese dared not open the gate to their comrades.

What had brought the Tatars to Shankiang? How had they buried the quarrels of the khans? Who was leading them to the attack?

Khlit felt his heart swell with pride. The hosts in front of him were of his blood. They were the finest warriors of Asia or Europe. They were the men whose standard he had carried at Altai Haiten. He longed to be in their ranks, with a horse under him.

A blast of trumpets interrupted his thoughts. He heard a shout arise from the Chinese on the walls. At the same instant, at the sound of the *nacars* the Tatar array started into movement. Every column was in motion toward the walls. The reports of cannon sounded from the city. But the pieces were ill-aimed and little harm was done.

"Now you will see how the khans storm a city, uncle," roared Arslan, in a fever of excitement.

The ranks of horsemen were moving faster now, to the sound of the *nacars*. A roar went up from thousands of throats.

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Over the entire plain in front of Shankiang the Tatar army spread, from the river to the hills on the west. Like a torrent they rushed toward the walls.

Khlit watched them with troubled eye. He had never seen such a thing as this. An army of cavalry was storming the high walls of a city, without cannon, without engines of siege, or preparation of any kind.

XVIII

THE attack on Shankiang, says the Chinese history, the *Kang Mu*, lasted for five hours, from noon to the setting of the sun. And for five hours there was no pause in the fury of the assault, or the slaughter on both sides.

Khlit, watching keenly, saw the first rank of horsemen gain the space below the walls, where the cannon of the defenders could not reach them. Then he saw that each of the leading horsemen bore a long ladder. No sooner had they reached the walls than a thousand ladders were raised, from the ground or from the backs of horses which were trained to remain still while this was done. Up these ladders swarmed the footmen who had been clinging to the stirrups of the riders.

Other ranks joined them and as fast as ladders were cast down others were raised. The sound of the *nacars* continued without ceasing, accompanied by the roar of the Tatar hordes who struggled to gain a place under the walls. The archers and musket men dropped back a short interval and covered the summit of the walls with a shower of arrows and bullets. The Manchu bowmen were skilful and their shafts exacted a heavy toll among the Chinese, who returned their fire desperately, striking down numbers of the attackers.

The unfortunate Chinese who had been caught without the gates were cut down to a man. Their bodies, with those of dead Tatars, were flung under the walls to form a rampart for the ladders. Not for a minute did the Tatars, utterly brave and reckless of loss, cease their efforts. As the piles of bodies grew, added to by slain horses, groups of ladders were raised at a time, fastened together by ropes, and these were not cast down.

Tatar swordsmen swarming up them grappled with the Chinese on the walls. At places Khlit saw the pointed helmets of the Tatars spread over the summit of the walls. At such times bodies of Chinese held in reserve hurried up the steps to the walls and engaged the besiegers. After stubborn fighting the walls would be cleared, only to be assaulted again by fresh men of the khans.

Although the attacking horsemen fought recklessly, Khlit noted that they carried on the assault in perfect order, and that the men followed their leaders with blind obedience. The Chinese, on the other hand, although well armed and skilful fighters, gave way at times to panic and rapidly lost all semblance of order.

Arslan, who had been plying his bow unsparingly at the Chinese on the wall under him, who had no opportunity to defend themselves against him, gave a shout and pointed to the wall on the west.

"Ho, uncle!" he cried, "we gain the wall yonder. A strip of it is bare of the Chinese dogs!"

Khlit saw that what the archer said was true. The Tatars had cleared a space of defenders and were fighting savagely to force the Chinese further along the walls. Other ladders disgorged helmeted swordsmen to swell their ranks. A party of Chinese under a man in the uniform of a high officer were raking the Tatars with musket fire from near-by housetops. A cannon on one of the towers cut swathes in their ranks, but still the swordsmen swarmed to the assault.

"Those are the Ordus of Hotai Khan, Arslan," he cried in response, "but yonder are the men of Chepé Buga. There is where the Dragon will be struck a shrewd blow!"

Arslan turned and looked where Khlit pointed, to the river on the east. The level rays of the setting sun showed a strange sight.

"Hide of the devil!" swore Arslan in glee. "May the demons of purgatory devour me, but the Tatars are swimming the river. They are riding their horses against the junks of Li Jusong."

Thousands of horsemen were swimming across the Liao River, where the walls of the city had given place to the river. Li Jusong had placed his men in junks here, but the speed of the Tatar attack had not given them time to tie the boats together. The horsemen were climbing from their mounts and swarming over the banks of

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the river. Some, in scows, had boarded the junks and turned the cannon of the vessels against the other junks.

Chepé Buga, crafty in battle, had struck the city in its weakest place—the river. Already his men had demoralized the crews of the junks and gained the bank. Khlit saw horsemen rushing through the streets of Shankiang toward the river quarter led by Chinese mandarins.

Directly under the Tower of the Five Falcons a regiment of cavalry was crossing the square led by Li Jusong himself. They galloped in good order with lances in their hands.

Khlit saw the general of Wan Li sitting quietly on his horse watching the cavalry pass. At his side among his followers was the blind Li Chan Ko, his face tranquil amid the uproar.

XIX

ARSLAN pointed at the cavalry.

"Leo Tung men, and good soldiers all," he muttered. "Li Jusong has saved them to strike at any who entered the walls. Ho! What is that?"

From the western wall a loud cry echoed which ran from tower to tower. Arslan listened attentively, and turned to Khlit, a grim light in his eye.

"The western gate is forced, lord," he said. "The Tatar horsemen are in the streets. Soon they will be at the rear of Li Jusong's men. Look!"

Li Jusong had forced his horse into the ranks of horsemen, motioning them back from their course. Even the general, however, could not check the regiments of cavalry in full gallop. Some hundreds halted. Those who had passed continued on their way toward the river. The news that the western gate had fallen spread panic among the defenders of the wall under the Tower of the Five Falcons.

The Chinese turned and fled down the steps to the streets. A torrent of Tatars poured after them. A swift glance showed Khlit that where the Ordus had been fighting the cannon was silenced and the musketeers had vanished from the housetops. Chepé Buga's men still swarmed against the river bank.

Li Jusong with his handful of cavalry turned back to the menaced western quarter. But few of the infantry followed them. The streets leading to the south on which side the Tatars had not attacked were filled with a panic-stricken throng of Chinese. A wail went up that drowned the clamor of the *nacars*.

The sun was touching the horizon on the east. The dark mass of Tatar horsemen that had been outside the walls was flooding into the doomed city by the northern and the western gates. The cannon on the walls were silent. In the streets of the city a hideous tumult arose.

Khlit caught sight of a score of horsemen galloping recklessly back through the square under the tower. It was Li Jusong, returning with what was left of his men. The general halted at sight of the oncoming Tatars and wheeled his horse into a street leading to the south. His followers formed around him, trampling down the fugitives on foot. Like a hurricane they swept through the street and vanished.

Arslan unstrung his bow. Khlit nodded understandingly.

"The city has fallen," he said, absently. His gaze was fixed on one face among the corpses in the snow, and the dead horses. The first gleam of moonlight had shown him this face—Li Chan Ko's. The magician's prophecy had come to pass.

XX

IT WAS after the sun had set, and the pale moonlight had flooded the snow-covered streets of Shankiang, lighting the dark stains that spread over the snow, when a group of riders with torches arrived before the entrance to the Tower of the Five Falcons. The tall form of Chepé Buga and a younger man led the horsemen who halted before the entrance. The khan of the Hoshots was bleeding from a sword-cut over the forehead, and Berang, the younger man, bore a broken spear as his only weapon. Behind the two followed Chagan, his face drawn with pain from his broken leg. The two gazed curiously at the ring of stiff bodies that lay around the door of the tower. It was here they had learned from Chagan that Khlit had been seen during the assault.

Chepé Buga started and wiped the blood from his eyes as he saw a tall figure emerge from the narrow door, pushing aside the bodies that checked it. Another followed, but it was Khlit who drew the eyes of the

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Tatars. He stood with folded arms before the tower. Chepé Buga and Berang dismounted from their horses.

"Lord," said Chepé Buga, and there was respect in his deep voice, "we heard that you had lived through the battle and were in this tower. We came, as soon as we could leave our men, to seek you."

"Aye," said Khlit.

"Hotai Khan, eldest of the lords of Tatary was slain on the wall," continued Chepé Buga, "and Togachar died in the city. Many faces will be missing from the *kurultai* of the khans tonight. Lord, will you come to take your rightful place in the *kurultai?* The khans are waiting."

Khlit's glance searched the face of Chepé Buga.

"Have I a place," he asked slowly, "among the khans?"

"Nay," the voice of the Tatar rang out proudly, "not among the khans. When Chagan brought the message you whispered to him in the hall of Li Jusong that the Chinese forces were scattered and disorganized by pillage; and that Shankiang might be taken by surprise, there were some in the *kurultai* by the Kerulon who doubted. But when Chagan told of your answer to the offer of Cho Kien, we knew that you spoke in wisdom, and in loyalty to the khans. Nay, your place is not among us. It is the rank of Kha Khan, White Khan of the Jun-gar."

"Your message, lord," added Berang, "brought us victory. Without your wisdom we are a flock without a shepherd. Glad were we when we saw you on the tower, for we knew then that you had not been slain."

Quickly Berang raised his right hand, and carried it to his spear. Chepé Buga did likewise. A shout went up from the horsemen, in which Arslan joined. Khlit was silent, but his heart was big within him. Khlit, the wanderer, the man called the Wolf, had found honor and a home.

Arslan, the archer, lifted his voice in song.

"They sing no more the chorus
That once they sang.
They are—see their ghosts before us—
Dead men of Wang."

THE DESERT

by H. M. BEARDSLEY

DREARY, desolate, dry as the sage;
A vast, void waste where the sand-storms rage;
And the sun beats down so blatantly bright
That the dull drab sands turn blinding white—

And the heat-waves ripple and gleam and glare;
And a million demons are prancing there;
Demons of doubt, and thirst and fear,
Dance and dazzle and taunt and jeer.

They mock and beckon and lead astray
With visions of water that fade away,
Mirages of rivers lined with trees,
Shade, and quiet, and cooling breeze.

High in the sky, the carrion-crow
Trails the traveler down below,
Gliding expectant in circling loop
Poised for the quick triumphant swoop.

The buzzard knows there's no water there;
That the rocks are sizzling; the sands are bare;
And the only breeze is a dragon's breath,
And the only shade, the shade of death!

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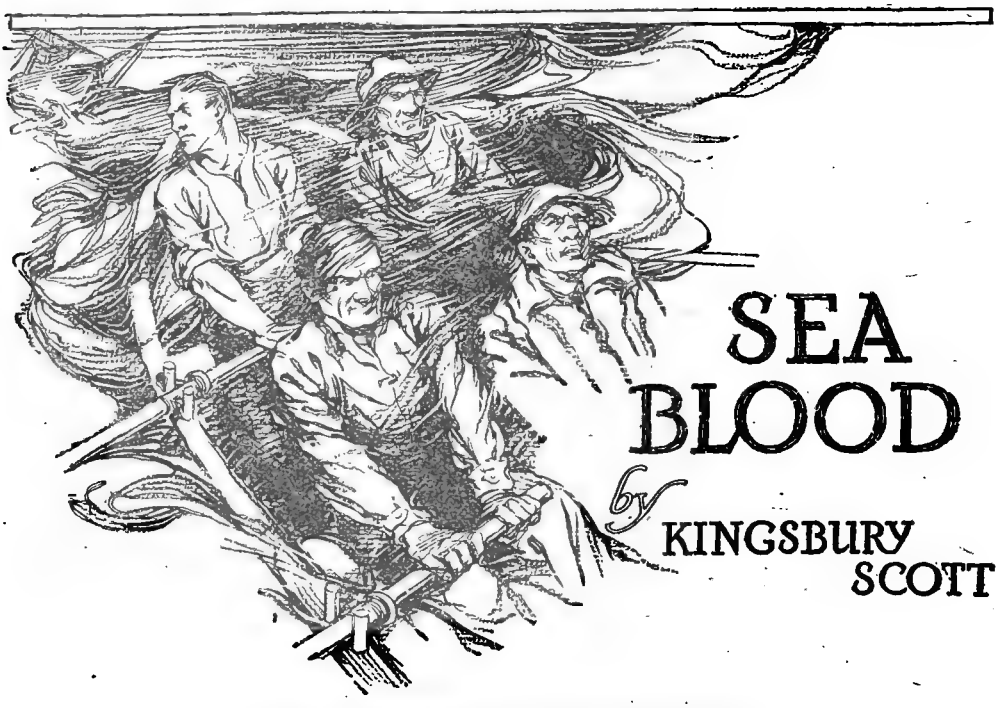

SEA BLOOD

by KINGSBURY SCOTT

Author of "Young Johnny Eistedt," and "Captain Jinx."

EVEN before he was born, it was meant that Dannie Conners should be a girl. This may seem strange, but it is true, none the less, because Mary Conners, as she waited in those days of expectancy, prayed that her second-born should be a daughter. With all her soul she craved the dainty girl, which, in her imagination, she had already guided through delicious babyhood to fill her place in the human order of things as the mother of men.

Mary Conners thought she had been supremely happy when little Jack, her first-born, came to her with his chubby hands and his strong little body so plump and glowing. She had watched him with adoring eyes as he grew into a strapping lad, and then the realization came. Soon he would no longer belong to her but to that mistress of all of the men of the Haven, the lake.

From her girlhood she had hated the sea and the howl of the gale. She had hated the ships, the reek of the tar and the crack of the booming canvas. Her father had gone down to the sea in his ship, and his father before him had trod the deck as master of his own ship, until a hurricane from the north had swept master and schooner into Uncharted Seas to return no more.

All of her young life she had lived among sailors and the widows of sailors, with the forests of spars constantly before her eyes and the boom of the surf constantly dinning in her ears. And then she had married young Dan Conners, not because Captain Dan was the best catch in the Haven, nor because he was a dashing young sailorman, with a schooner of his own, but because she loved him.

Still she hated the sea and all things of it. The heartaches and anguish and anxiety grew almost unbearable when the wind howled out of the southwest or bore screaming down from the north, if Captain Conners and his schooner were out.

Never was she as happy as when the little schooner lay safely moored in Winter quarters, stripped of her canvas and snug from the storms, while Captain Dan, in his easy chair at home, toasted his shins before the roaring fire in their little sitting-room and bounced baby Jack upon his knee. With all her heart she loved the Winter, which brought her dear ones safely

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home to her, and she dreaded the coming of Spring, which would bring the parting.

With sinking heart she listened to Captain Conners as he talked of the days when Jack should sail a schooner of his own, and she well knew that the time must come at last when Jack, with his bag on his shoulder, would climb over the rail of a ship to serve the only mistress the men of the Haven knew.

And now while her heart throbbed in expectant love she prayed that her second-born would be beyond the claim of the sea forever. That is why Dannie Conners should have been a girl.

It was a howling night when the baby came and just as the cry of the new-born babe brought a faint smile to the face of the white-lipped mother, Captain Conners' sturdy little schooner swept to her moorings in the harbor out of reach of the gale. Mary Conners dared not speak as Mrs. Bridges flitted about the room in a busy flurry and Dr. Lawrence rubbed his hands in cheerful satisfaction.

"Ah, but it's a fine baby, Mrs. Conners," he said, smiling down at her.

Mary Conners' eyes pleaded eloquently but her lips did not move.

"Oh, why don't they tell me!" she cried deep down within herself.

"Why don't you ask me the question, Mrs. Conners?" inquired Dr. Lawrence, seeming to read her desire. "Most women can hardly wait, you know. Women are natural gamblers, it seems to me, and the coming into the world of an infant is always more or less of a gamble, isn't it? Not at all curious, eh, Mrs. Conners?"

Mary Conners smiled triumphantly.

"Let me see her, won't you?" she whispered. "Is she a pretty little girl?"

"Bless you, my dear woman!" exclaimed Dr Lawrence in surprise. "Why, it's a boy—a great big bouncing, sturdy boy. Bless his heart!"

Mary Conners gave a little sob and buried her white face in the pillow. Dr. Lawrence, with a puzzled look in his eyes, gazed down at his patient's heaving shoulders. Mrs. Bridges sat down upon the bed beside the mother.

"There, there, Mary, dear," she crooned, patting the mother's head. "You mustn't cry, dear. He's such a little darling and you're going to love him, Mary."

"Yes, yes," hurriedly put in the doctor. "This will never do, madam. A beautiful boy baby is something to rejoice about, not cry over. My dear woman, I think he's going to be the image of Dan."

There was a heavy stamping of boots on the little front porch and Mrs. Bridges flew to open the door.

"Oh, Captain Conners," she began, as the big form pushed past her with a gust of wind.

"Has it come?" he anxiously interrupted, and without waiting for an answer, he strode into the little bedroom.

His wife had ceased sobbing at the sound of his voice at the door, and she gazed up at him with adoration in her eyes.

"Dan," she whispered, as he bent over to kiss her. "I'm so glad you're in out of the storm."

The captain patted her white cheek.

"So the little stranger has come, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, he's here, Dan, dear," she smiled.

"A boy!" he exclaimed, and a glad smile lighted his big, bearded face, as he bent down again and kissed her tenderly on the forehead.

"Yes, a boy," she answered, with her bare arm about his neck. "Little Dannie, he'll be. You're glad, aren't you, dear?"

"God bless him!" he exclaimed in a trembling voice. "I must see him, Mrs. Bridges."

Mary Conners watched her husband as he peered happily down through the white things into the face of his second son, and as she watched, her eyes glowed and her white face became beautiful in a smile of happiness.

II

WHEN Dannie was a wee lad, strangers in the little lake-port used to stare at him and marvel at his beauty. Even those among whom he was growing up felt that there was a strange twist in his make-up, although not even his parents or his playmates could fathom him. They knew only that he was an odd little chap, vastly different from his older brother, Jack.

Withal, he was a natural, active and vigorous boy. As a little lad he excelled in most of the games his companions played and he could outrow many of his larger playmates. But as he grew older his oddity

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increased and there were times when something of a depression settled down over his boyish mind, and he shrank away from every one but Mother Conners.

His eyes were of the deepest blue and they carried in their depths the suggestion of constant brooding. His face, delicately and sensitively molded, was decidedly girlish in its cast, and his complexion was as fair as a babe's.

About his ears his hair fell in softest waves, the color of ripening corn, and above all was that fineness of fiber, which was the mystery about him, and which won for him among his mates, the name "Sallie Conners." If he resented it, he never betrayed the fact, perhaps because of his absolute indifference to everything and everybody save Mother Conners.

For that great throbbing subject, the ships and the men who sailed in them, which was first thought in the minds of every one in the Haven, Dannie Conners had only contempt. He seldom went on board of a ship unless, perhaps, his father's schooner, and then only when he was sent there on an errand.

His brother, Jack, following in his father's wake, soon shouldered his bag and clambered over the rail of a lumber schooner, and when he had reached his majority he was master of his own ship, a handsome three-master and one of the prides of Lake Michigan. But even this honor in the family did not inspire enthusiasm in Dannie's breast. He hated the sea. He was afraid of it, and when the gales howled he shuddered at the thought of it all.

It was upon Mother Conners that he poured out all of the love of his young heart. He worshiped her with undying devotion and from childhood he had been with her almost constantly, even resenting the love she gave to her first-born, his older brother. For his father there seemed to be not the least particle of filial affection in the boy's heart. It was all for Mother Conners. Her joys were his and her sorrows and her anxiety tortured his heart.

During the season of navigation they lived alone together, Dannie supremely happy to have her to himself, though he suffered when she suffered because the gales howled and the ships were out.

When the snow began driving in from the lake and the schooners went into Winter quarters Dannie rejoiced, not because he found pleasure in the companionship of his brother, because Jack was beginning to treat him contemptuously, but because Mother Conners was happy.

Before he had reached his fifteenth birthday, Dannie had attained the stature of a man, with the strength of a man and the heart of a woman. And worst of all, he felt that he was a keen disappointment to his father. He brooded over it until he began to feel the desire to shrink away from the big, bearded man, whom he was compelled to recognize as the master of the house, and who gave him sharp glances and sharp words of command, which latter Dannie always obeyed but resented bitterly.

One Spring morning the break came, as Dannie well knew it must come some time. Captain Conners had finished fitting out his schooner and was packing his belongings in preparation for his departure. The captain was bending industriously over his bag and Dannie stood gazing dreamily out of the sitting-room window across the sand-hills at the blue-green lake, while Mother Conners bustled about laying out the captain's newly laundered and mended clothing.

"Dannie, my lad," said Captain Conners, without looking up, "you're growing up to be a fine strapping lad."

Dannie was silent and the captain went on packing.

"You'd better be making ready to come aboard with me as soon as your school closes this Summer, lad. I don't want to be hurrying you off to work, my boy, but with a couple of Summers aboard, during vacation, you'll be earning a little bit for yourself and at the same time learning some of the little things that'll make a sailor out of you when you're ready."

Dannie turned away from the window in time to see the look of agony flash into his mother's face. An inward message told him that something which she had long been dreading had come at last. His heart fairly stopped in its beating and his throat contracted painfully.

"I'll not be ready for sailing, sir," Dannie replied, his voice quivering.

Captain Conners glanced up quickly, his pipe clenched between his teeth.

"What's that, boy?" he asked sharply. "What's that you're saying?"

"I'll not be going sailing, sir," repeated

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Dannie, his voice pitched high with nervousness. "I hate the whole business and I'm not going into it. I'm sick of it all. I've seen nothing and heard nothing all my life but boats and I hate 'em!"

Mother Conners glanced fearfully at her son, and Dannie, catching her eye, calmed himself.

"I'd be no good at it, father," he continued evenly. "I'd rather do something else, sir."

"What in the name of common sense is there for you to do around here?" exploded the skipper.

"I'd find something," replied the boy. "Anything but sailing."

"Are you ashamed of it?" angrily questioned Captain Conners. "Ashamed of the calling that was honorable enough for your father and your brother, and your whole family way back on both sides? Ashamed of it, eh? What's come over you to set yourself up as a better man than those who brought you into the world?"

"Dan, Dan," soothingly interposed Mother Conners. "Don't be harsh with the boy. I thank God he don't take to sailing. Isn't it enough for me to have you and Jack away without taking Dannie, too? Dan, Dan, he's all I've got to stay by me here at home!"

"You don't expect to keep a big hulking boy like him hanging to your apron-strings forever, do you?" he inquired, turning fiercely upon her.

"I'll not be hanging to her apron-strings," angrily retorted the boy.

"Surely, Dan, there's something the boy can do besides going sailing?" pleaded Mother Conners.

"What is it then?" challenged the captain. "Preaching or selling sugar in some grocery store for six dollars a week all of his life, I suppose. From now until he gets too old to be any good to anybody, he'd be working for somebody else.

"Look at Jack! He's barely twenty-one, and sailing a schooner of his own. And look at Tom Beckworth's boy! He's all of two years older than Jack, and still clerking for old man McTavish down on the river-front. Every time I see that boy lugging baskets of provisions aboard my schooner I thank God my Jack had gumption enough to get aboard of a schooner and make something of himself."

"But Dannie can make something of himself, too, Dan, without driving about on a schooner," argued Mother Conners. "And if he did want to be a preacher—there's no disgrace in it, is there?"

"For them that takes to that sort of thing," bitterly retorted the captain. "For the like of them, no."

"You're scoffing, Dan," reproached his wife.

"No, I'm not scoffing, Mother Conners," asserted the captain. "I believe in the Gospel and I believe in the preaching of it. But there's enough men that's weak in body to do the sky-piloting, and it's the duty of the able-bodied ones to be doing something that their talents and their bringing up fits 'em for."

"Supposing Dannie had the talent for preaching or teaching or something in that line, Dan?" insisted Mother Conners.

Captain Conners smilingly surveyed his wife's troubled face.

"Mother, mother," he said softly. "You can't hatch a peacock from a duck's egg. The boy was born to the sea."

"Ah no, Dan, my dear," replied the mother with a sigh, "Dannie wasn't. You don't understand, do you? Dannie wasn't meant for it, and it isn't God's will that he'll ever command a schooner."

III

THAT Fall was a terrible season along the east shore of Lake Michigan. Storm merged into storm and gale followed gale. No sooner had one tempest blown itself out, than a breeze sprang up in the southwest, worked itself into a howling fury, to swing into the west and then haul to northwest for another steady gale of several days' duration.

Schooner after schooner ran scurrying to shelter and smoke from the passing steam craft swept down the horizon in a thin line of murk. Ships missed harbor, in desperate attempts to seek shelter. Oaken bones piled up on the sandy shores and sailors went to death before the agonized eyes of their own. Those were trying days for Mother Conners, overcome frequently by anxiety and suffering.

There were days when the wind howled and the sea roared in its fury, that Dannie tramped the beach in desperation, cursing the fate that made Mother Conners a sailor's wife and a sailor's mother. During

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the long Summer, much to Dannie's satisfaction, he had seen but little of his father, and then but few words had been exchanged between the two.

His father's indifference to him hurt him more than he admitted even to himself, but he spent much of his time wandering aimlessly over the hills, fighting for a grip upon his turbulent spirit. Always there arose in his heart the same fear of the sea which had marked him as a mere child and he found himself longing to gather up Mother Conners and carry her bodily out of their dreary region of storms and ships to a pleasant land somewhere where there was no roar of surf and no boom of filling canvas.

And then suddenly the crisis came to Dannie's life. At the end of a day through which a southwester had been gaining headway, Captain Conners came home. Late in the afternoon his lively little schooner had scudded close-reefed through the breakers of the harbor mouth and slipped safely to her moorings up the channel.

After a silent supper the captain's huge frame was settled in the big chair in front of the round oak in the little sitting-room, and the captain tried to read. Mother Conners, seated beside the red-clothed table, was bravely attempting to sew, but as each gust of the tempest shook the house Dannie, from his seat in the darkened corner, saw her body quiver. A deep anxiety tore at the hearts of the captain and his wife, but they struggled to conceal it.

"It's done nothing but blow from all quarters for a straight month, mother," spoke up Captain Conners at last, throwing aside his paper, "and it's getting on my nerves. Lord! I've run close-reefed during the whole month of October, and November's starting out the same way. I've lost more trips on account of weather this Fall than in all the years of my sailing, and with the lumber rates up to top-notch, too."

Mother Conners dropped her sewing in her lap and clasped her hands nervously.

"It's terrible, Dan, terrible! Is there no let-up to it?"

"None that I can see, mother," replied the captain. "It's growing worse if anything. I think the wind's hauled more to west'ard now and we're feeling the full sweep of it."

"Oh, God grant that Jack's inside somewhere tonight, safe and warm!" cried Mother Conners.

"Mother," began the captain, softly, "there's no good can come of holding out false hopes at a time like this. Jack left Chicago this morning, and with a gale of wind like this after him, and a good ship like he's sailing, he should have shown up off here before now.

"I wish he was inside, mother, I wish he was. There's no use denying it. The seas are making in the jaws of the piers all the time and the wind's hauling into the nor'west. It'll be harder for him to make the hole out there than an hour ago."

"My God, Dan! I knew it!" cried Mother Conners. "I've felt it in my bones all through this terrible day that my boy was out in this. That's why I couldn't sit here and be comfortable when my Jack was out there fighting for his life. God save him! Oh, God, save him!"

"Be easy, mother," comforted the skipper. "I've been out in lots of 'em as bad as this in my little schooner, and I weathered 'em, too. He may have been able to beat it back to shelter under the Chicago breakwater, or he might have run for it while the wind was southerly and made the Manitous. There's always shelter there. Maybe he's laying to comfortable outside, waiting for it to ease up a bit on the bar so's he can run in. He's got a good ship under him, mother, and Jack's as good a sailor as ever took a helm."

"Ah, yes," sighed the mother. "He's a good sailor and a good boy, too, thank God! But it's small pleasure I've had out of him, Dan. You took him away from me when he was hardly more than a wee lad, and he hasn't been mine since. It was hard to give him up then, Dan, but now if anything happens to my Jack it'll break my heart. My Jack! My Jack!"

"He's cut out for a sailor," soothed the captain. "You shouldn't be bitter against me now, mother, because the boy decided to do what it was natural for him to do. He's never done us anything but honor, and I'm proud of him. Besides, you've had Dannie there to yourself. I've never tried but once to make a sailor out of him, and then only because I thought it was his natural living.

"Since then I've never interfered. I've left you to make what you like of him, though I must say I'm fearing for him.

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He's taken to nothing and he's older now than Jack was when he made his first trip. I'm not saying he isn't a good boy, mother, but it's a good stout-hearted brave lad like Jack I wanted him to be."

"I'm thankful you've left Dannie to me, Dan," replied Mother Conners, her voice atremble. "It's one less of you I have to worry about, at least. I know where he is on nights like these. I know that the lake isn't battering him and freezing him and trying to wrench him away from me. I know that he's warm and safe and dry, anyway, Dan. And he's a stout-hearted lad, too. He's as brave as any man afloat or ashore."

"He's yet to show it, mother, and I'm fearing he never will," persisted the captain, firmly. "I've said often that it don't do a a boy good to tie him to his mother's apron-strings, and it don't."

"Then it's me that's to blame if Dannie's different from others," asserted Mother Conners. "I wanted him for myself. I've wanted one who didn't follow the lake. I hate it for the fear and worry it's caused me, first for you and then for Jack, too. Can you blame me for wanting my baby for myself? One is enough to give up to the lake, isn't it? I cried my heart sick when Jack went, but I didn't try to keep him, did I?"

"There, there, mother," gently reproved the captain, "there's no one blaming you. A man can't help what God has done."

A HEAVY pounding at the door brought them both to their feet in startled anxiety.

"Who's there?" demanded Captain Conners.

"It's Johnson off the *Petrel*, sir!" called a voice almost drowned in the scream of the storm.

Throwing his weight against the door to prevent it from being flung open by the wind, Captain Conners slid back the bolt and cautiously opened the door a space. Mother Conners held up her apron to shield the lamp from the blast which swept in with a rush, swinging the pictures on the wall and sending the loose things flying from the shelves.

With the sweep of the wind came a bulky figure clad in yellow oilskins, with a yellow sou'wester buckled under his chin. The oilskins glistened from the sleet and rain which had beat against them in the climb up the hill, and the man's face was red from the cutting of the flying sand.

"It's a rough night, Johnson," commented Captain Conners in a calm voice, while Mother Conners, her hands clasped tensely to her breast, gazed with mute appeal into the newcomer's face. "What's wrong, man?" challenged the captain.

"There's a big three-master hit the bar," began Johnson. "She was trying to get in, sir, about half an hour ago, when she fetched up and she's burning a Coston. The boys think she's in a bad way. Looks as if she was straddling the bar and you know that'll break any craft in two in no time. If she lets go out there such a night as this, it's good-by to all of 'em.

"The keeper down at the station's tried to reach 'em with the surf-boat, but the boys couldn't make it against the sea. It's boiling in the jaws of the piers and the boat's capsized every time they tried to get her out. The life-savers are all in now and a couple of 'em's pretty badly jammed up, sir. They've been trying to get a shot over her, too, but it's no go."

"It's Jack!" cried Mother Conners in anguish. "My God! It's Jack—trying to get home, poor boy! Oh, I knew it! I knew it!"

"I'm afraid so, mother," replied Captain Conners in a low voice. "Try to be brave, little woman, and hope for the best. The boys are doing all in their power to save him for us, and they're brave men, mother, who are not afraid to risk their lives."

"I thought I'd better come up and tell you about it, Cap'm," ventured Johnson. "You might want to be down there on the beach, sir."

"Yes, yes, Lars," remarked the skipper. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Hurrying into his great boots and slicker, and clasping his sou'wester under his chin, the captain took Mother Conners in his arms.

"Be brave, little mother," he said tenderly. "I am going down there and if God Almighty's willing, we'll save our boy. I'll let you know about it all as soon as I can. Meantime don't raise your hopes too high, mother. Just pray to the good Lord to save our Jack, and give us strength to bring him in safely."

"Dannie!" he ordered, his voice deep with authority. "You're to stay right here with

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your mother until I come back! Don't leave her!"

Gripping the door in his strong hands, he bent his yellow helmet to meet the drive of the storm and strode away into the black night.

IV

IT SEEMED hours that they cringed there together, Mother Conners and Dannie, waiting for word from the beach. They heard the occasional distorted mumble of a voice hurled up to them by the wind from the walk below.

Dannie made frequent trips to the window in the darkened bedroom, where he pressed his face against the glass and peered out to catch a glimpse, now and then, of a light in the direction of the beach. Mother Conners, her heart rent with anxiety and suffering, often stood beside her son, vainly searching the darkness for something which would give her knowledge of Jack's fate.

At last the boy could stand the strain no longer.

"Mother," he said firmly, "I'm going down to the beach. I'm going to find out something for you."

"Your father said you were to stay here," she reminded him.

"Are you afraid to stay here alone, mother?" he asked.

"There's nothing for me to fear, my son. It's only Jack I'm fearing for now, Dannie," she assured him.

"Then I'm going, mother," he announced. "I don't care what father said. It isn't right to keep you worrying in the dark this way. Perhaps some of the neighbors will come in pretty soon, and when I can find out something about what they're doing on the beach, I'll come back to you."

Pulling on his reefer and his cap, he rushed out into the storm and burrowed his way against the wind to the beach.

The wind at times stopped his progress completely and the flying sand stung his face, but he plowed on into the storm. In the darkness he could hear voices ahead of him and he knew that half the little town was fighting its way through the gale to the beach to stand by helpless, while out in the seas men struggled for their lives.

As he rounded the bend in the sandy path, he caught a glimpse of the beach, illumined by great bonfires about which were grouped hundreds of men in oilskins and women with shawls over their heads. Some of the women were crying out prayers to the men to save the endangered ones, and others stood white-faced and terror-stricken in the presence of impending death.

Strong men, giant fishermen, and sailors in their slickers and high boots willing to risk their lives in the effort to save others, stood back helpless in defeat and heartsick over their failure.

"They're hangin' to the riggin' now," Dannie heard one of the men say to a woman, whose shoulders shook with sobs. "The seas must be comin' aboard too heavy for 'em to stay below. Keeper Eisted's got a busted rib but he's stickin' to it, and they ain't goin' to give up while there's a ghost of a chance. If they can get your man off, they'll do it, Mis' Larsen. This crew's the best in the service."

Another fisherman shook his head doubtfully.

"Don't hold out no false hopes, Tom," he advised. "There's not a mite of good can come of it. The life-savin' crew's all in. The last two boats that tried it were full o' volunteer men but neither of 'em could get outside the piers. The sea's somethin' wicked in the jaws and every boat has turned over there and spilled their men into the surf. Now the keeper's knocked out, but he's running things from the beach and he was just sayin' he was goin' to try the beach gun again.

"Cap'm Dan Conners is in charge of the boat now but there ain't no show for him gettin' out, either. The surf-boat stove a hole in herself when she slammed up against the pier the last time and the big English life-boat's too heavy for men to handle against this sea."

As Dannie's eyes became accustomed to the darkness he could see the dark outline of his brother's doomed ship lying broadside to the harbor entrance fully two hundred feet out from the pier heads, and as the beacon in the steel tower on the beach flashed, he could make out the dark objects clinging to the rigging.

A sharp report and a spit of flame marked the position of the beach gun, but the shouts of the hurrying men about it preparing for another shot made Dannie's heart sink. He knew they had failed again

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and he had not the heart to go home and tell Mother Conners.

Into his young mind flew the picture of the white-faced little mother at home, anxiously peering into the dark night for some faint gleam of hope, and his heart cried out in pity for her. Suddenly the fear of the sea left him and his brain reeled with the desire to conquer the storm which was causing her anguish.

His soul became filled with a wild contempt for the power of the sea, and forgeting the resolution he had made to keep out of his father's sight, he pushed eagerly among the workers about the beach gun. Over on the pier near the place where the great life-boat was pulling at her moorings in the channel, he heard a shout.

"They're callin' for volunteers to man the life-boat again," he heard a man say. "Cap'm Conners thinks if he can get near enough to heave a line aboard the schooner he can carry it ashore in the boat and take off the men with the beach outfit. They ain't got one chance in a thousand, though."

"I was out twice in the boat," said a man next to Dannie, "and I can't risk my life again. I got my family to think of. 'Course you can't blame Conners for wantin' to keep at it. His boy's out there."

"He's mighty proud o' that boy, too," chimed in a third man. "And he's got reason to be. Too bad 'tain't the young one. He's no good to anybody. 'Tain't that kind that has to go, though."

Quivering under the sting, Dannie rushed to the pier, where below him from the stern of the ungainly life-boat he heard his father's heavy voice calling for men.

"Who's going with me this trip, boys?" shouted the captain out of the darkness. "Remember it's a risky job, and I don't urge any man to risk his life with me. It's my son's out there, and I believe, with God's help, we can save him and his crew!"

Noiselessly Dannie slipped down into the bow of the life-boat, keeping his face turned away from his father, and in constant fear that some one would flash a lantern in his face.

"Forward there!" challenged the captain's voice. "Can you pull a good strong oar, man?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Dannie, his voice muffled in his reefer.

Instantly big, broad-shouldered men began dropping silently into the boat, and Captain Conners' attention was drawn away from the first volunteer in the forward seat. In the darkness Dannie could not recognize any of the men who were to be his mates on the trip into the raging surf, but he knew them to be the pick of desperately courageous men, willing to go into the very jaws of death to save fellow men from their common enemy, the sea.

When the crew was complete Captain Conners sang out to the battered Eisted on the pier—

"Orders, Keeper?"

"Use your own judgment, Captain Conners, and God speed you!" replied the keeper.

AT THE quick, deep-throated command the heavy oars cut into the water with a long stroke, as the huge barge-like craft swung clear of the pier into the stream. Almost immediately she began taking the swells, slipping deeper and deeper into the hollows of the waves and mounting higher and higher on the crests each time, but always driving forward under the determined stroke of the big-shouldered men at her oars.

Dannie's back swayed and heaved in the heavy rhythm of the pull, and he watched the broad backs of his boat mates swaying in time with his own. But no word was spoken. In the stern he could make out his father's heavy form and he knew he was peering ahead into the darkness in the direction whence came the roar of the breakers on the bar.

Nearer and nearer came the thunder, but Dannie dared not look around lest he break the rhythm of swaying backs at a time when every ounce of human strength in the boat was needed.

He could feel the dashes of cold spray against his face and he could see the black water surging alongside the boat as she drove through it. Then the combers began breaking, and he knew the feared bar was near. Great splotches of white foam swept past, hissing defiance at the little crew, but Dannie felt no fear in his heart. Instead the hatred of the sea and its fury grew more intense within him. He was conscious only of a desire to fight it and win. The thought of danger never came to him.

Thus when the life-boat leaped into the

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maelstrom of hissing white foam in the jaws of the piers, he felt a strange exultation and his heart leaped with pure joy of the battle. For a moment it seemed as though the life-boat and her crew were completely enveloped in solid water. Monster seas swept entirely over the craft, burying her under tons of blue water.

Dannie caught his breath sharply and the man next to him swore between his firmly closed jaws. Above the roar the boy could hear his father shouting:

"Steady, boys, steady! We've got her yet! Hold her into it, lads!"

Gritting their teeth in desperation, the men threw their strength into the stroke until the long blades bent under the strain.

It seemed ages that the open boat and her broad-backed men were hovering in the valley of death. The mighty strokes of the volunteers seemed inadequate to drive her through the walls of water which constantly enveloped her and hurled her back. The combers fairly seethed and boiled as they tossed her mercilessly to her beam ends.

By magnificent seamanship, Captain Conners kept her always headed toward the rushing combers, like a bleeding, battered animal always facing the enemy, and springing at it again and again.

Through it all the men at the oars never failed their commander. Always their blades cut the water when the back rush of the breakers began, and forward drove the life-boat, bit by bit. Taking the wind in her teeth, she forged forward until at last, as though loosed from a leash, she leaped ahead through the combers and drove outward into the open sea and into the mountains of dark, forbidding water sweeping in to feed the maelstrom.

But there was no respite for the half-drowned crew of the life-boat. Every unit of their combined strength was necessary to force the heavy craft over the rolling mountain of water, which constantly towered above her. Every man knew that once the boat failed to rise to the crest of the dark walls only a miracle could save them. But they drove grimly on and on in the wage of their desperate battle not only to save others, but for their own preservation as well.

In the phosphorescent light which sometimes robs the night at sea of its blackness, the long, dark hulk of the three-masted schooner loomed ahead. Dannie glanced hurriedly over his shoulder and his eyes beheld the dim wreck. The mizzen spar careened forward against the mainmast, but it still held and its rigging was filled with men desperately clinging in spite of the cold. The white foam twined about the low hull of the imperiled ship like a shroud.

V

AS THE rescuing crew drew up, the schooner swung around almost head to the seas and the breakers swept her fore and aft, leaving practically no lee to protect the approach of the life-boat. In the terrific force of the gale there seemed to Captain Conners but two ways of reaching the wreck. One was to drive the life-boat through the teeth of the gale to the stranded ship, with the chance of putting a man aboard with a line in the moment she would cling to the wave-swept sides of the schooner.

The other meant a long pull to seaward and a desperate run in with the combers, with the hope of holding the life-boat near enough to the wreck to heave a line aboard. Desperate in his determination to save his son and the perishing crew if human power could accomplish it, Captain Conners tried both plans and both failed.

The terrible strain was beginning to tell on the silent fishermen, who had borne their drenching and battering without a murmur. Their strong backs had lost some of the rhythmic motion, and their strokes lacked the vigor which had driven the life-boat through the combers in the jaws of the piers.

In the half-darkness the men hanging to the rigging watched in agonized suspense the vain attempts of the life-boat to reach them, their hopes rising each time the white craft swung into sight on the tops of the rolling crests.

Up in the bow of the life-boat Dannie sat drenched to the skin, shivering with the cold, and bitter with the realization of the ultimate failure of the bold attempt to save Jack. Suddenly a wild scheme entered his brain and the details of the plan flashed through his mind as the boat was slowly working up toward the wreck. The men were rapidly tiring now and he knew it must be the last attempt.

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Reaching down into the locker under his seat, his hand struck a wet heaving-line and he smiled with satisfaction. Without mentioning the fact to the man beside him, he cautiously made fast the end of the line to his cork jacket. Then he said in a hoarse whisper to his seat mate—

"You pay out this line, steady and easy, will you?"

The fisherman looked at him in amazement and for the first time recognized him.

"Gad!" he breathed. "Is it you I've been sitting with? Man, but you pull a great oar!"

"Never mind me," cautioned the boy. "Do as I tell you and don't say anything about me to anybody until I'm clear of the boat and don't haul in! Whatever you do, pay out this line and give me slack!"

Nearer pressed the life-boat to the wreck, but even the fishermen with strong backs could not force her longer against the combers. Captain Conners' heart sank as he felt the last chance slipping away and his shouts rang out above the gale.

"Drive her, my lads, drive her!" he cried in desperation. "We can get 'em! We can get 'em yet if you can hold on a little longer!"

Dannie, too, felt the boat slowly losing her headway in the sea. For a moment he seemed to see Mother Conners' white face peering anxiously out from the bedroom window at home. Through the storm he caught the pleading note in his father's voice, and silently he slipped over the side of the life-boat into the boiling sea.

"Who's overboard?" cried the captain.

"He's carryin' a line, sir," grimly replied the man who was paying it out.

"God help him!" muttered the skipper. "God help him! Stand ready, men, to haul him aboard if he gives out!"

Comber after comber broke with a thundering roar over Dannie's head and whirled him over and over in its fury. There were times when his arms ceased their strokes and his mind grew numb and blank from sheer exhaustion. Then before his dazed eyes drifted the picture of the white face of a little woman pressed against the window in the little house on the hill.

"She wants Jack! She wants Jack!" he shouted within himself. "She's waiting up there for him to come home and she'll have him! Oh, God, she'll have him!"

He felt no emotion save hate for the combers which were pounding down upon him. His mind conceived no prayer for strength, but his lips framed bitter curses of rage at his weakness, and he fought with the unnatural force of a madman.

In the darkness there was no opportunity to measure distance, but he felt the current of the seas slowly giving way before him, and he thought that he was gaining. Suddenly he seemed to be swept forward at a terrific rate, to be caught in the white crest of a boiling comber which sent him whirling down deep into the depths.

Instinctively he struck out, rising to the surface once more, only to be thrown heavily against a solid wall of timbers. His fingers grasped desperately at the slippery planks as he felt himself being carried, bumping along with the seas, until his outstretched hand closed over a heavy chain. He gripped it hard and held to it as the seas engulfed him again.

More dead than alive, he drew himself up slowly under the bows of the wrecked schooner, and with the sea threatening to tear him from his refuge, he lay over the chain until he had regained a little of his strength.

Then with the blood oozing from his battered body, and every motion causing him to wince with pain, he began his terrible crawling to the deck of his brother's vessel, with the line fast to his cork jacket.

WHEN the heavy life-boat came plunging in through the surf, many men were ready to meet it and assist the exhausted crew to the fire. But behind the life-boat trailed the thin black heaving line. White-faced men and women pressed close as Captain Conners explained that out in the surf one of his men was struggling against awful odds to carry the other end of that line to the deck of the wrecked ship, thus to give the perishing ones their connecting thread of life.

He explained how his men had been unable to hold the big life-boat longer against the never-ending sweep of the combers, and how it had been caught at last, when their strength ebbed, and hurled helplessly shoreward, while one of the men paid out the heaving-line to the man whom they had left behind.

"God bless him!" exclaimed the captain fervently at the end of the tale. "'Twas his own idea, not mine. He was over the

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side before I knew what had happened. Gad! I hope he made it! A man with that courage deserves to win. I don't know who he was, but whoever he was, God bless him and spare him!"

"Sure, he was your own boy, sir," said the man who had paid out the line.

"What do you mean—my boy? My boy? What boy?" sharply demanded the captain.

"Dannie, sir," returned the fisherman. "And he pulled a grand oar, too."

"My God!" cried Captain Conners. "His poor mother! How can I tell her?"

Suddenly there was a shout from the men on the beach and many hands were outstretched toward the sea. Far out over the raging surf a bright torch gleamed and flared in the rigging of Jack's schooner.

"They've got the line!" cried the keeper. "Lively boys, now, make fast your lines! Touch off a torch, Walters! Signal 'em we're ready to haul away!"

Within half an hour the lines had been drawn eagerly through the surf at the end of the heaving-line and made fast on board of the wreck where men had been spurred to action by new courage. Then the beach rig went up swiftly. At last through the surf came the breeches-buoy with its first passenger, who was hurried away to be revived with stimulants and wrapped in blankets at the station-house.

Again and again the tackle creaked as the buoy dragged men half dead through the seas to the beach until every man save Captain Jack and Dannie were safe. They came together at last, both in the buoy with the line bending down under the weight, Jack clasping his brother's limp body about the waist. Willing hands seized them and carried them away to the warmth of the station-house.

With his own hands, Captain Dan Conners wrapped his boys in the blankets provided by the life-savers. He tarried until they were safe and warm and then he hurried to the little house on the hill where Mother Conners was waiting with haunted eyes to hear the verdict. He had sent no one ahead with the message because he had wished to make sure that there would be no mistake, no false joy to be turned to torture for Mother Conners.

"Tell me the worst, Dan!" she demanded, staring at her husband with fear in her eyes. Then, as though reading the answer in his face, she started forward with a glad cry "Oh, God! Is he safe?"

"Yes! Yes!" shouted Captain Conners, with a ring of joy in his voice. "Thank God, I can tell you so, Mother!"

"And did you see Dannie? Does he know about it?" faltered the little woman. "Don't be harsh with him, Dan. I sent him out."

"He's safe, too!" cried the captain. "Great God, little woman, what a man our Dan's been tonight!"

With the wife clasped tightly to his big breast Captain Conners told her the story of Dannie's heroism, while the tears streamed unchecked down their cheeks. Captain Conners' came in a sob at last as he recalled Dannie's white face smiling up from the blankets at the station-house.

"It's the blood in him! It told at last. It's the sea blood!" he cried.

Mother Conners quivered as though under a great shock, and she stared at her husband with anguish written in her drawn face. Suddenly it seemed as though the lake had after all won its victory over her.

"Oh, it can't be! It can't be!" she whispered. "He can't go, Dan! You don't understand."

In her mother's heart she knew well enough why the sea and its ships must never claim her Dan. She knew by her mother instinct, that Dan's courage was not the call of the generations of sea blood flowing through his veins. Further she knew full well that she must not submit to the pressure which would bring down the secret hopes of her boy, tumbling like a wreck about his feet. Eagerly, therefore, she watched Captain Conners' face to better form the battle forces of her will.

"I'll not interfere, Mother," declared the captain, with a smile. "He shall choose his own way. He's earned the right, God knows. Has he anything in mind?"

"Yes, Dan," answered the mother timidly, feeling that she was about to betray a confidence. "He's hoping to go through college, and perhaps he'll decide to be a preacher, after all. Don't say anything, Dan, until you've thought it over. You've always said that preaching was for weaklings. Our boy's no weakling, Dan, and he's brains, too."

"Oh, he'll get his sky pilot's papers, all right, Mother," laughed the captain. He's got the blood, the sea blood, that'll make him stick anywhere until he makes good."

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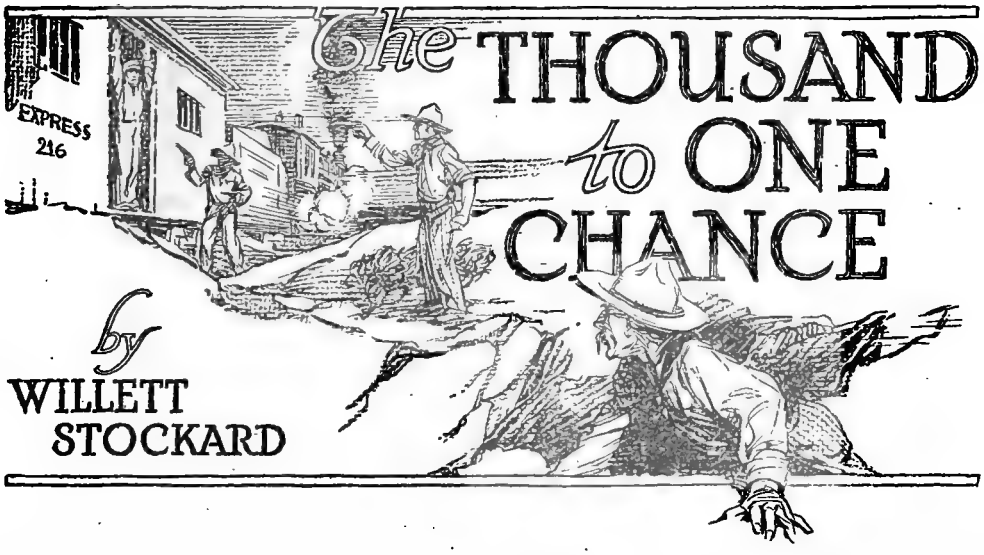

The THOUSAND to ONE CHANCE

by WILLETT STOCKARD

"YOU win—take the money," said "Merino Cal," with the trite addition, "but it ain't poker."

"Lucky" Baker laughed.

"What's the use of playin' 'em careful as long as I got a bunch like you fellers to donate to me?" he remarked. "I can be pretty smart when it's necessary, but there ain't any sense in going to a lot of trouble for nothin'. I've got luck, an' I'll back it ag'in' science any time."

He dealt the cards to the half a dozen men about the table, all associates of long standing, with the exception of one, Eddie Bevins, whom Merino Cal had known in El Paso and had introduced to the circle.

"Say, haven't I known you somewhere?" the newcomer asked Lucky, after having looked at him intently for some time.

"Reckon not—I never knew you," responded the other, never genial toward strangers and rarely with friends.

"Your face seems familiar," pursued Bevins. "I must've seen you before, although I can't place you right now. I've knocked about considerable in the last two or three years, all the way from Nome down into Lower California. You mentioning a while ago about something that happened up in the Klondike once made me think maybe it was somewhere up in that part of the world I'd noticed you."

"I've been right here in this State for more than the last three years," Lucky answered shortly.

He was not in the habit of talking at length of the various places in which he had been, probably for sufficient reasons, and he switched the conversation, or rather resumed his remarks upon the subject of luck, a favorite topic with him.

"Yes, sir, I'll back luck agin' science or anything else. I don't play hunches an' I ain't superstitious particular, but I was just born lucky, an' that's the system I play—always dependin' on my luck to carry me through, an' it ain't never failed me yet. If I didn't have it, I'd figger out some other system, even if it wasn't nothin' but workin'. I always claim that luck is somethin' that if you've got it, you've got it, an' if you ain't, why, you ain't, an' that's all there is to it."

The game went on for several antes. Lucky drew to a flush broken in the middle, caught the wanted card, backed his hand more heavily than its value called for and lost to some one who held a full house. He withheld any sign of irritation at the moment, but his ill humor was betrayed at the first opportunity, which came when he noted Bevins' continued gaze.

"If you never knew me before, you sure ought to the next time," Lucky remarked.

"He wouldn't known anybody much in particular, if he did," cut in Merino Cal, who considered himself Bevins' sponsor, having introduced him.

"He ain't in the habit of knowin' anybody of much consequence, it seems, judgin' from some of his friends," Lucky returned pointedly.

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"Oh, you're trying to start something, are you?" demanded Cal. "I spoke in a perfectly good-natured way, just sorter kiddin', that's all, but if you're wanting to make something else out of it, I'll give you the best I got."

Cal was of an even disposition, but there had been several disagreements between him and Lucky, and he now sat looking at the other with an uncompromising eye.

"Just make it light on yourself," replied Lucky with an insulting manner of indifference. "Go to it, if you think you'll have any luck."

Cal got to his feet, and started around the table. Lucky arose also, but almost at the same instant he received a blow to the chin which sent him falling over his chair to the floor. Even before he ceased falling, he began fumbling for his gun, which everybody knew he habitually wore in poker sessions. Merino Cal noted the movement. He was unarmed himself, but a friend produced a little ivory-handled affair which he placed upon the table, and lightning-like Cal snatched it up just as Lucky was getting to his feet, drawing his gun as he arose.

Cal had the advantage, however, and with his revolver leveled full at the other's face he pressed the trigger—and the gun snapped. Another instant, and Lucky had flashed his forty-five up and fired. Merino Cal dropped the ivory-handled toy, and grasped the edge of the table.

"I reckon that beats me," he said simply.

Then he sank back into a chair, and his head fell over on the table. A few seconds later the others began to come from the various places in which they had thrown themselves, and gathered about the motionless figure. But even before then Lucky had dashed down the stairs.

The game had been surreptitiously conducted in the upper part of a feed store, behind which, on the other side of a wide lot, were a wagon-yard and a livery-stable. To the stable sped Lucky. He kept his horse there, and in short time he had caught, bridled and saddled him and a moment later was speeding out of the gate and off toward the western part of town.

HIS departure, rapid as it was, was made none too soon. News of the shooting had spread rapidly. Some of Cal's friends and relatives were hurrying to the stable. As Lucky rode out of the gate there came half a dozen shots from one of them who was armed. None touched him or his horse, however, and before the others could get mounts Lucky was spurring from town, his horse fresh and good for a race with anything in the county.

He chose the road known as the Rocky Crossing, in order that a small creek which had to be forded there would prevent pursuit by auto. The posse which he knew would follow would be delayed some minutes for a sufficient number to get horses and guns, and with three minutes' start Lucky had no fear of any of those behind

He was well aware, however, that his escape would not be due to lack of the utmost effort on the part of his pursuers, for Cal was about as popular as he himself was unpopular. Whether they were bent upon capturing him to turn him over to the officers or to administer justice of their own, Lucky could not surmise, but he did not concern himself greatly with the problem. He had trust in the speed of his horse and more in his unwavering luck.

He even momentarily relaxed the tenseness with which he had held himself since the shooting, and carelessly turned in his saddle to see if there were any signs of his pursuers as yet. His mount, a skittish young animal it was, shied violently at a newly painted sign-post which showed white in the gathering dusk, and Lucky, taken wholly by surprise, was ditched in spite of his quick efforts to save himself.

He was unhurt, and sprang to his feet instantly, but the pony showed a new outburst of speed, reached a turn in the road a hundred yards off and headed south. Lucky knew it would likely continue in that direction until it reached the ranch, some twenty miles distant, from which it had been taken not long before.

He climbed through the barb-wire fence at the side of the road, and lay low in a shallow ravine in the adjoining pasture. In time he could hear hoof-beats from a distance. The sound approached rapidly. Cautiously raising himself and peering back down the road, Lucky could make out the outlines of seven or eight horsemen bobbing up and down as they came over a rise in the twilight. He dropped back into the ditch, lying flat, and in a few minutes the posse galloped past.

Lucky congratulated himself upon the

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manner in which his good fortune held true in this latest precarious situation. In all likelihood the posse would keep upon the trail of the runaway horse, which led toward the border, the direction which everybody would naturally expect Lucky to take. For the immediate present he was comparatively safe.

He began to form new plans for his flight. He dismissed the possibility of obtaining a horse at some near-by ranch or farmhouse, for he had conceived a far better idea. A mile away was the railroad and two miles up the track was a water-tank at which all trains stopped. Lucky decided to continue his hegira by train.

The next one to stop there would be the east-bound passenger, he remembered, which circumstance caused him some misgivings at first. Fugitives from that part of the country always went south or west. So long as he had no choice, however, he began to perceive certain advantages in going eastward. Novelty of means and unexpectedness of direction would increase his chance of success.

Lucky made his way to the water-tank. He prepared to wait through a dull hour until the train was due, but within fifteen minutes there was sufficient to occupy his attention to the exclusion of any possible ennui. Along the fence that skirted the right of way twenty-five yards distant he beheld a quartet of horsemen.

It occurred to Lucky at first that his horse had been caught by members of the posse, who were now returning to search for him near the scene of his spill. He stole off into the weed-filled ditch at the side of the railroad track. Half a dozen steps away was a little culvert through which he might crawl unseen to the opposite side of the track, but before he could reach it the horsemen had dismounted, left their horses and approached the tank.

Although Lucky was concealed in the rank growth of weeds, he was too near them to attempt to move, and remained where he was—so near them, in fact, he was able to hear everything they said, in spite of their cautiously lowered voices. And their first words dispelled the impression that they belonged to the pursuing party, although adding nothing to Lucky's sense of security.

"I can't help wishin' we'd brought another man or two for the job," began one.

"Four's enough, an' any more'n that would jest be that much less for us when we split the stuff," spoke another, who from his manner appeared to be the leader. "I don't reckon there's any hoboes stickin' around this here tank."

"There ain't a soul nearer than the pumper's shack, an' that's out of sight around that bend yonder," said still another. "Chief, suppose you kinder run over a little rehearsal here on the grounds."

Lucky gave up thought of immediate action, and remained hugging the ground, while the man addressed as "Chief" sketched his plans to his followers.

"Train due here in a little over half a hour," he said. "We'll take up positions when we hear her comin'. The engine will stop with the tender right under this water-pipe, of course. 'Mex' and Harry will stay in the shadow of the tank, an' I'll get in the ditch on the other side of the track till after the headlight passes over me, and then when the train has come to a stop I'll climb into the cab from that side, an' Mex will climb in from this one.

"We'll cover the engineer an' fireman, an' Harry will keep here in the shadow to keep a lookout that nobody opens fire on us from the coaches while we're makin' 'em climb down out of the cab. Durin' all this time, Luke will be back up the track yonder about seventy-five yards, about where the end of the train is, to watch the length of it from the rear."

"When do I start shootin'?" asked some one, presumably Luke.

"Unless some of the passengers or crew start trouble, don't fire till you hear us start shootin' up at this end, an' if we can help it we won't open up till we get the *dinero* from the express car, an' then we'll aim high an' into the top of the cars, jest to keep the passengers from gettin' inquisitive an' pokin' their heads out."

They talked for a while longer over arrangements, about their plans of escape, speculated upon the difficulty they might have in accomplishing the hold-up, upon the amount of money likely to be obtained and other things.

LUCKY realized to the full the seriousness of his position. It was taking a long chance for him to attempt to get on the train while it was surrounded and being held up by bandits.

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But it was the only chance left him. It was out of the question to think of getting away through the country now, for on the following day every yard of territory for miles around would be covered by men on trail of the outlaws.

For one of the infrequent occasions in his life, he swore at his luck, at the long coincidence which placed a quartet of hold-up men waiting there to attack the train which he was waiting to hide himself away upon, with perhaps his life depending upon the outcome. But the situation was too vitally interesting for him to devote much time to futile railing at fate—the present was too precarious for him to afford much thought to the future.

From the west there came a distant whistle and the faint rumble of the train, a low noise which increased rapidly. One of the outlaws started up the track to the west to take his designated position about where the rear of the train would stand. Another, the leader, crossed the track to drop in the ditch on the other side, the remaining two keeping well within the shadow of the tank structure.

"Gosh, I'm nervous as a bride," Lucky overheard one of them remark.

He himself was pressing as closely as possible against the side of the ditch as the train rounded the bend and its headlight flashed over the landscape. The light passed on over the place where Lucky lay. The noise of the train increased, although its speed was slackened, and the engine stopped beside the tank.

Lucky held himself ready for instant action. He raised himself slightly, just enough to survey the scene. His position was almost even with the forward trucks of the second car, the express car being the first. The men about the engine were intent upon the work in hand, but the one called Luke had disobeyed orders to remain at the rear of the train and was walking back toward the front.

His eyes were taking in everything between him and the engine, and, while he halted two car lengths away, he would perceive Lucky at the latter's first movement toward creeping to the train. So Lucky remained where he was, swearing nervously to himself and waiting for the first opportunity to climb upon the rods of the nearest car. Meantime he kept the man in the rear in view, with an occasional glance toward the men about the engine.

The man called Mex had climbed into the engine cab with drawn gun, and a moment later he and his leader, who had entered the cab from the opposite side, herded the engineer and fireman down to the ground. The bandit from the shadows now came forth to assist his pals, and the entire party came back to the express car. The messenger yielded to threats and opened the door. Covering him with his gun, the leader climbed into the car. A brief time later he reappeared in the lighted doorway, hugging a sack in his arms, and sprang to the ground.

"I got 'er—let 'er go!" he shouted, regaining his feet and shifting his bundle under his left arm in order to have free use of his gun-hand.

It was all over in an almost incredibly short time, even though each second seemed unnaturally prolonged to everybody concerned; to the victims, to the bandits and to the nondescript, Lucky. Since the train was due to stop there for water, none of the passengers or the remainder of the crew had their attention attracted.

Probably none of them would have been aware of the hold-up at the time had not the outlaws started their previously planned fusillade as the engineer and fireman returned to their cab. Two of them began firing over the express car, while the man at the rear also opened up, shooting into the top of the last sleeper. Now that the latter's attention was occupied, Lucky gathered himself for a dash to the cars, just getting in motion.

But a precautionary glance to his right revealed the form of the leader running toward the rear of the train and directly toward the spot in which Lucky was crouching. Again he stretched himself prone, breathing a prayer that the outlaw would overlook him. And so it might have happened, since the other was looking at the lighted cars over which he was firing, had not his feet stumbled over Lucky.

He must have realized that the obstacle was some living thing, for upon recovering his balance he halted and turned to see what it was. And as he did so Lucky whipped up his own gun and fired point-blank at the man's heart. The leader toppled to the ground like a brained steer. Lucky cast quick glances in both directions. The remainder of the band, all

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many yards away, were still intent upon their business and had not witnessed the quick affair.

Lucky saw his chance to reach the train in safety. That was his only thought—after his narrow call, little else mattered beside his own security. It was practically without thinking that he snatched up the tow sack in which the leader had dumped the haul from the express car. With it pressed against his body with one arm, he dashed up the few feet of incline to the track, and swung himself under the car, now moving at some speed.

None of the bandits was paying attention to his section of the track at the moment, and his maneuver was unnoticed by any one. Before he realized it almost, he was leaving the scene, the unexpected treasure hugged to his chest, at a speed as great as the engineer was able to make it.

Within fifteen minutes he was carried back into the little station of the town he had left so hurriedly little more than two hours previously. But he was not greatly perturbed. It was dark, and there was little likelihood of any one seeing him. He took advantage of the halt to settle his position more comfortably. He had been a hobo, and was familiar with all parts of the train employed by tramps, from the deck to the gunnels; but for the present exigency he chose the rods, and safely stowed away in the little nook just above the trucks he was able to ride as far as the car went, with little danger of being found.

There was a lengthy wait at the station while the engine ventured back, running light, for water, and then for the greater part of the night Lucky was steadily carried farther and farther from the place of the recent happenings.

NEAR morning the train reached the division point at the end of its run. Lucky left it at the first stop in the railroad yards. He carried the tow sack slung in careless fashion over his shoulder. From a man stretched out on a bench in the station park Lucky bought a cheap slicker, and at the first opportunity he removed the contents of the sack, mostly packages of currency, and bestowed them about his person so that they fitted him as inconspicuously as possible. Then he made his way across town to the station of another railroad.

He kept in the dark as much as he was able, although there was no serious danger of confronting anybody who might recognize him, and he searched the waiting-room of the ticket office carefully before he entered, his hat drawn low over his face and his figure enveloped in the slicker.

Dawn found him seated by himself in the rear of a smoker with a ticket to Kansas City. There, some twenty-four hours later, he bought an entire outfit of clothing, from hat to shoes, all of an Eastern cut. When he had satisfactorily disposed of everything previously belonging to him, his old clothes and even his trusty gun, he felt that he had put his past life wholly aside. He continued to exercise caution, more from force of habit than anything else, but when aboard another train carrying him eastward he dismissed the last worry over his possible apprehension.

In fact, he was able to obtain considerable amusement out of a paper containing news of the Southwestern country, two accounts of which concerned him. One was a brief item of the shooting of Merino Cal, with the intelligence that the wounded man would recover and that his assailant had made good his escape over the border.

But the other was given extensive space—its news value due not alone to the sensational hold-up and loss of money but to a certain element of mystery connected with the affair as well. Lucky laughed aloud as he read it. The body of the dead bandit was found beside the track and the three other outlaws were captured the morning after the robbery. Fleeing from fancied pursuit, they had ridden straight into a large, heavily armed posse which had been scouring the country for another fugitive. And then the element of mystery.

The captured men were unable to throw any light upon the death of their leader or the whereabouts of the money. They had found him dead with no trace of the sack he was known to have had in his possession only a few seconds before. In fact, they had wasted valuable time searching for him before stumbling over his body—and still more trying to find the missing booty.

Evidently—due possibly to the darkness or to their haste and excitement—they had failed to give attention to any marks Lucky might have left; and likely, too, crowds of the curious upon the scene early the next

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morning had trampled the ground to the obliteration of traces helpful to the authorities. The latter, so Lucky read with satisfaction, held the view that the prisoners themselves had murdered their chief and had hidden the money before being taken; the dead man having been killed by a gun of the same caliber as those worn by two of his men.

Lucky ended his long eastward jaunt in a most secure and pleasant attitude. After a few days of recreation in New York, he departed for the little village in New England which he had left twelve years before, swearing that none of his friends would hear of or see him again until he returned with a fortune.

He had traveled extensively since that day, and, true to his word, he had communicated with no one and was now returning with a sum that amounted to a fortune in that small town. He was content to settle down and remain there. His past life had been sufficiently strenuous to satisfy him thoroughly, even without the recent occurrences, and he chose to regard it as a closed account.

And that was not a matter of great difficulty. He had never employed his real name. He never mentioned that he had once lived in the East, and it was seldom that he had spoken about his own affairs at all. To account to friends at home for the past decade and more, he had rehearsed a story of a lengthy sojourn in a remote part of South America, a section with which he was slightly familiar, having visited there once. That would be a sufficient alibi, coupled with his natural reticence. He had no fear whatsoever as to his future peace of mind, no fear of remorse or that he would be connected with any of his past deeds.

Indeed, now that he was once again at home, he could not avoid a kind of exultation at thought of his most recent exploits and the dangers he had come through—Merino Cal's gun leveled full at his face, only to snap harmlessly, the loss of his horse and the bloodthirsty posse passing within a few yards of him, that weird hour at the water-tank, the escape by the narrowest of narrow shaves, not only with his life but with an unexpected fortune as well, his successful flight since then—in short, at winning out when the chances against him must have been more than a thousand to one.

"Yes, sir," he repeated to himself, "I was born lucky, an' if a feller's got luck, he's just simply got it, an' that's all."

HE ALIGHTED from the train at his home station, and surveyed the crowd loafing there—strangers, for the most part. He realized for the first time that a younger generation had grown up in the past twelve years. But he saw several older men whom he recognized, among them the old sheriff of the county. The latter, evidently still in office, advanced to meet him with a grin.

"Hello, Abner," he said, calling Lucky by his real name, shaking hands with him and grasping his arm. "Somehow I sort o' been expectin' you for several days. I got instructions to hold you for some parties wantin' you down in Texas."

"What for?" gasped Lucky.

"Shootin' somebody named Merino Cal, or some such thing. Of course, nobody had special reasons to think you might come home, but they wired me to get you, case you did, an' later I got a letter."

For once in his life Lucky's poise deserted him. He was stunned by the unexpectedness of the blow. He could not muster energy even to simulate lack of comprehension. As for resisting arrest, no such thought entered his mind. He allowed the sheriff to take his precious grip from him without a word or gesture of resistance. Unlike his old reliant, resourceful self, he seemed to be in a helpless, hopeless stupor.

"How did they manage to know who I was?" he inquired weakly after a time.

"It was right queer," answered the sheriff. "D'you remember the Bevins boys here—little fellows, I guess, when you left? Well, one of 'em, Eddie, is grown now, an' has been driftin' about over the country for last few years, an' as luck would have it he was a friend of this fellow Merino Cal, an' I believe he was present when the shootin' took place.

"Anyway, he wrote that your face was familiar to him, but it wasn't till afterward that he was able to place you an' remember it was back here he'd known you an' who you was. It wouldn't happen again in a thousand times—just pure luck, or I reckon bad luck for you, an' you was always considered ruther lucky, too. Luck is a funny, funny thing, ain't it?"

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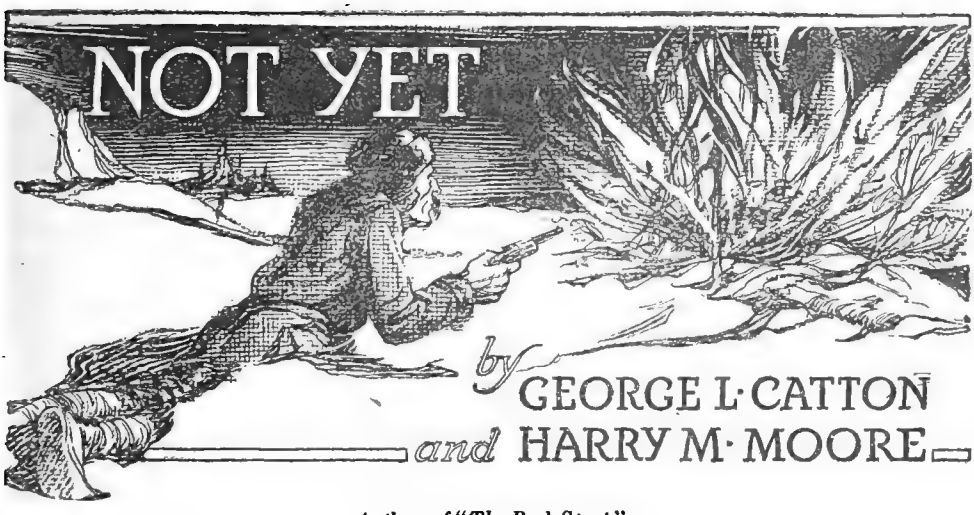

Authors of "The Real Sport."

NICK McCANN raised his head. He wasn't finished—yet.

Midwinter, and the eternal silence of the arctic night. Away to the south a southernmost sun fought its brief battle with the long darkness, and faded away. To the north the hissing tongues of the aurora streamed high against the star-stained sky, and died out. Across the ghostly valley the poplars, single sentinels in the glittering snow, snapped weirdly as the frost bit deep. The world lay dead. As far as eye could reach upon that vast white waste nothing moved, nothing lived.

The snow-shoe rabbit, hungry, crouched low in his runway, long ears lifted, listening. The gray timber-wolf, gaunt-flanked, skulked in the matted spruce, snarling at his gnawing stomach. Even the silver-tip bear, hibernating, dreamed restlessly beneath the snow blanket of her Winter bed.

Only a man, Nick McCann, faced the rigid death of that endless tinseled shroud.

It was carelessness that brought Nick to his knees. In the planned order of his living Nick should have been fifty miles to the east, setting traps, snares and deadfalls, or smoking his pipe in his cabin beside a red-hot stove. But carelessness had altered those plans. A work-wearied body and a heavy, hot meal, and a pair of socks left to dry too near the stove—Nick had wakened barely in time to save his blankets.

And afterward, when a frantic search among the cooling ashes of his Winter's food supply returned nothing, Nick had swung his heavy revolver around within instant reach of his hand and started west. Whitehorse was eighty miles west.

But Nick's revolver never left its holster. Nothing living moved upon the endless snows. Even the wolverine—the stinking glutton of the waste—refused, though famished, to leave the shelter of the tangled knots of juniper.

On that silent waste Nick was alone.

For twenty hours through the powdery snow, without snow-shoes, Nick's moccasined feet pumped up and down, up and down in short, monotonous, ceaseless tread. For twenty hours he faced grimly to the west, and a chance to live. He covered forty miles. Then he dropped his blankets. His strength was going.

Whitehorse was thirty miles west when Nick went down. It was twenty-eight miles west when he quit crawling. But he wasn't finished—yet.

Nick raised his head. The fear of death was on him.

The fear of death. The physical terror of the Unknown that kept the unthinking animals under cover, the awe of the Beyond and the loathing to leave the joys and ambitions of human realization—the hate of the intangible foe to love and laughter and happiness and tears, that is the fear of death.

Nick raised his head. On the right, in

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the half-lights of the aurora and the stars the sheer wall of a bluff shot up a hundred feet. At its foot a jumble of dead spruce and poplar brush reared its ragged crest above the snow. Nick's mittened hand fumbled for his pocket, feeling for matches. He wasn't finished—yet.

Twenty minutes later a tiny flame licked fitfully through a handful of snapping twigs and weathered bark, and Nick propped his back against the bluff and watched it. On all that vast expanse of glittering frost-dust those dancing flames were all that moved. Everything else—Nick's dull eyes roamed aimlessly across and down the valley—everything else had ceased to be. Of all the life that Summer engendered in that peaceful valley nothing lived. The world lay dead.

Nick felt for his revolver and laid it on his quivering leg. There were five shells, five crashing, life-extinguishing slugs of lead in that revolver, waiting for but a touch of his finger to release them. He had but to raise, to point the muzzle, to look down into the yawning mouth of that heavy weapon. . . .

And the other alternative was—was the creeping, lingering death of starvation!

In his fear of death, in his numbed mind Nick was trying to decide he would go—which way?

The fire left the tiny heap of twigs and bark and roared into the pile of brush. In half an hour that stack of flimsy fuel would be gone, burned out—dead. And then . . . Nick shuddered. What then?

That question awoke for a moment Nick's numbed brain. He glanced down into the upturned muzzle of the revolver and shook his head grimly. He could still move and think and . . . And the fire was hot. He wasn't finished—yet.

A moment later Nick moved back a few feet from the intense heat of the roaring brush-heap and lifted his revolver again. Out beyond the narrow circle of the flame's heat the frost was waiting. It was only a matter of a few hours till—till—till what? Nick raised his head with a jerk.

The flaming brush-heap before him rose up and scattered in every direction!

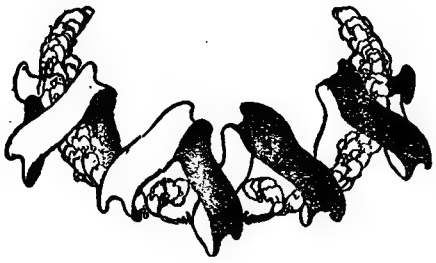
And then—

Her long hair singeing with the intense heat of the blazing brush, her wide mouth agape with rage at the disturbance of her hibernation, a huge silver-tip bear heaved her thousand pounds of fighting muscles up out of her Winter bed beneath the heap of brush!

Nick's dim eyes blazed up. His quivering hand gripped hard the revolver—stopped quivering—rose rigidly. Then five short, heavy roars staccatoed out across the dead silence.

The bear, that thousand pounds of bloody-red meat, coughed once, and crumpled down in the snow.

Nick felt for his knife. He wasn't finished—yet.



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The PASSING of GORILLA GEORGE

by R.N. WALL

DAN FARMER sat in the middle of his room at the Talbot House, at a table directly under the feeble gaslight. His thin, brown, pleasant face was beaded with sweat, for it was a hot night. Nevertheless, the two long French windows of the room, which gave upon an upper porch that ran completely around the hotel, were shuttered tightly, for Farmer was engaged in counting a small pile of green and yellow bills.

The two five-hundred-dollar gold certificates that made the most valuable part of the heap had reposed, an hour before, in the safe of Lawyer Creel. Farmer had just turned what he fondly promised himself was his last trick. For fifteen years it had been his business to crack safes. For several of those latter years his one thought had been to escape from that business.

The preceding Spring, passing through Talbotville, he had discovered a farm, owned by Creel, which had fascinated him. Creel had promised to sell it for three thousand dollars. Farmer returned to his old haunts and his old occupation, more determined to acquire that amount and quit.

Having obtained the necessary three thousand dollars by a daring robbery, he returned to Talbotville, happy in the thought that he was about to close the deal, become an honest onion grower, and, in the classic phrase that might have come from his own mouth, be able "to look any —— man in the eye."

But he found that all crooks do not inhabit the cities. Creel insisted that the price of the farm was four thousand dollars, which Farmer could not and would not pay. He had finally passed over three thousand dollars to Creel, and agreed to give a deed of trust for the balance. This unpleasant legal formality he had just made unnecessary by removing from Creel's safe the necessary additional thousand.

Farmer's attractive face beamed with a certain satisfaction as he thumbed the money over. He had hated this last step in crime. He had hesitated a long time before he decided to make it, but his resolution once taken, he had not been able to refrain from a little zest in the execution.

He was a man who played the game hard and he bolstered himself with the thought that he had simply retrieved his own. At the same time, he promised himself fervently that his future should be snow clean.

He slipped the money into his pocket, stood up, and stretched, ready for bed. As he did so, there came from outside one of the shuttered windows a sound that he had never expected to hear again. It was that low, but distinct and resonant sound called the thieves' rap—the knuckle-tap used by tramps, crooks and opium-smokers to attract one another's attention, and often, by means of a pre-arranged code, used by convicts to talk from cell to cell.

Dan could not believe his ears at first. He waited, breathless. It came again, a little louder. Still he hesitated, his thoughts in a wild whirl. Who in this little country town, deep in the heart of Georgia, would wish by this signal to communicate with him? Again the rap came, more insistently. Farmer unlatched the blind.

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INSTANTLY there appeared at the window a great leering face, unspeakably horrid and obscene in its degradation. The low brutal forehead, the small fierce eyes and the heavy prognathous jaw with matted whiskers covering cheek and chin had earned for the man who stood there the sobriquet of "Gorilla George."

Quickly, in spite of his apparently unwieldy bulk, the man slipped through the window, straightened, and closed the shutters behind him.

"What in —— made you so slow openin' up?" growled the intruder, glaring at Farmer, who gaped as though he saw a ghost.

A ghost, indeed, George was to him; a specter from that hated past he had thought buried for good and all. George had never been a pal of Dan's, but they had, on occasion, worked in company. Farmer knew him for a vicious, sullen desperado, a killer, a man disliked and feared even by his own kind. Gorilla means in thieves' patter, a man who commits robbery by violence, so the nickname had a double edge.

"What did you come sneaking up that way for?" parried Dan. "Why didn't you come up the stairs?"

"Yah! Wit' a brass band, I 'spose," sneered George. "Must be wit' a swell mob, the way you put on dog. Ain't very strong wit' the glad mit, are you?"

"You took me by surprise," said Farmer, forcing a pleasant voice. "Sit down."

George slouched across the room, pulled back the mosquito-bar that hung about the bed, and threw himself down upon the cover, careless of the dirt on his heels.

Farmer, neat as a cat himself, was thoroughly revolted, but he held himself in check and sat down in a chair facing his unwelcome visitor.

"What brings you to this little burg?" he asked, striving to speak lightly.

"Oh, just moochin' along south for the Winter," said George, as he pulled out half a cigar.

He lit it, spat on the carpet, and filled the room with evil-smelling smoke.

"A guy in Atlanta tipped me off that the P. O. here was easy, and I stopped off to take a look at it. I laid up in a patch of weeds outside of town today, and I lamped you moonin' around down by the river.

"Just after dark I come in town, and goin' through an alley back of Kingdon's jewelry store—I see the sign afterward—I saw 'em closin' up the safe. Say, they put in a wad of kale big enough to stuff a stovepipe! Small bills, but likely two or three thou, and there oughta be some good rocks in the shop, too. Now that's better'n foolin' wit' Uncle Sam, and havin' to soak the stamps wit' some —— fence at twenty cents on the dollar.

"What I wants of you is this. I can split the safe wit' soup easy enough, but it makes a noise and I'd have to hustle my get-away. You can open that peter in a minute. We make it fifty-fifty—all right?"

Farmer had listened in silence. It was plain that George expected him to welcome the offer. As a matter of fact, Dan was filled with disgust. At a table in a Chicago saloon such talk had seemed commonplace enough, but to his new-found conscience, it seemed horrible that this filthy creature should foul the little country town as his dirty body soiled the spotless bed.

It was in the nature of the little man to voice his thoughts but he contented himself with saying coldly—

"Nothing doing."

"What!" roared George in sheer surprise. "Don't you want a couple of thousand picked up as easy as sucking eggs? What's yer lay, anyhow? Workin' wit' 'Silky Bill'? I seen him goin' inta the other hotel, and I thought it was —— funny you two was both in the same jay town. What's yer game?"

"Silky Bill?" said Farmer with raised eyebrows. "Oh, yes, the swell pennyweighter. I just know him by sight. The only thing I ever had to do with him was to work on some fake information he give a pal of mine, that blame near got us pinched."

"Oh, you don't want to lemme in on yer grift, then," said George suspiciously. "What do you pretend yer doin'—workin' alone?"

"No," said Farmer, "I've quit."

"Aw, tell that to a cop."

"I mean it. Lemme show you how it is, George," Farmer explained patiently. "I got a wife and child. The kid don't know what business her daddy's been in, and my wife always did hate it like poison. I been wanting to quit for years.

"Last Spring I gets ditched here from a rattler, and I takes a shine to the town. I goes to see a feller named Creel, who shows me a place just like I been honing for. He says he'll take three thousand. You

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remember that inside job Joe and I pulled off just outside of Chi? That gimme the price and I come down here to close the deal and live straight."

"You talk like you was full of mush," said George. "I've heard you chatter about growin' onions, but I thought it was all pipe stuff. 'Twon't hurt you to do one more job 'fore you turn Christer. I need you to help me open that peter, and yer a-goin' to help crack it."

"I turned my last trick tonight," said Farmer unguardedly, "and so help me God, I'm through."

"Oh, you did, eh?" snapped George. "A trick tonight, eh? In this little town where yer goin' to be a pillar of wirchew? Lemme tell you something, bo. I'm a man that makes up my mind, and when I makes it up, it stays made, see? You help me wit' that safe tonight or I blow—good and loud!"

"Would you split on an old pal, George?"

"You didn't act much like an old pal when I come in. You don't act like one now. Why should I scratch yer back if you won't rub mine? If you did one job tonight, you can do another."

"Lemme explain it, George," said Dan, controlling himself. "I come here to close the deal, like I tells you. This Creel had promised to sell me the place for three thousand. When I see him this morning, he wants four. I ain't got it, so he offers to take three and a mortgage for the rest.

"Finally I agrees, and then I goes back tonight and gets my extra thousand out of his safe. It was a job, of course, but it wasn't stealing. I only took back what was mine. I'm telling you so you can see I been on the square—that it really wasn't no crime."

"Well, what's bitin' you, then?" leered George. "I'll just put it up to the perlice, and if they say it ain't no crime, they ain't any skin off you, is they?"

"I don't feel like kidding, George."

"I ain't a-kiddin'. I made up my mind and you make up yours. You open that safe and we divvy even; turn me down and I spike yer game. Take yer choice, and hurry up about it, for I want to get away on the midnight freight."

FARMER felt that he could no longer contain himself. Every time that the farm seemed within his grasp, the Fates conspired to make him loose his hold. Every time that he swore he had taken his last step outside the law, circumstances drove him back out again.

He measured the distance to the bed. He was a small man, but his lithe muscles were like steel springs. Could he leap upon George and throttle him before the yegg's weight and bull-like strength crushed him?

He was unarmed, and he knew that George always carried a gun, which he would a little rather use than not. His eyes roved about the room. Could he pick up a chair and crash it upon the Gorilla's head and beat the gunflash?

George answered his thought.

"Don't try any fancy play," he growled. "If you make a horstile move, I'll bore a hole through you big enough to sling a cat through." And he showed the ugly mouth of an automatic which he had gently slipped from his side pocket as Dan's eyes swept the room for a weapon.

George's little eyes glowed red and wicked. Farmer knew the lust that the man had for blood and he realized that the slightest offensive move would unchain death. Yet, what to do?

"George," he said at last, "what do you think we'd get out of the Kingdon job?"

"Comin' to yer senses, eh? That's better. Two thousand sure, besides what loot we could get in sparks and hoops and turnips."

"Supposing," said Farmer slowly, "I hand you an even thousand. Will you call the job off, and get out of town?"

"Hand me a thousand for lammin'?" George stared at Farmer in amazement. "Will I drink booze? What's the idea?"

"Just this," said Farmer. "I tell you, I'm on the level. I won't crack any more peters and I don't want you to blow any here. I want to stand on the square with this town. If you'll go down and get aboard the midnight train, and give me your word not to come back, I'll slip you two five-hundred dollar notes. You get 'em without work or risk.

"If you won't—" the little man's jaw was thrust out—"we'll scrap it out. You may get me with your gat, but you'll probably go to the chair for it. Take your choice."

George scratched his matted head.

"I think yer clean batty. Of all the fool plays I ever see, for a gun to turn down makin' a thousand and give up another thousand to boot—it's the plum' limit. Yer head's turned soft. It's a sucker play.

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Come on, help me crack the peter, and we'll slide out for N'Orleans and have some fun."

"That your last say?"

Farmer's eyes gleamed dangerously. His slender frame was tense. It nearly broke his heart to give up the hard-won thousand which spelt the price of his independence. And, clear grit as he was, he would rather fight than bribe.

But the bitter thought came to him that no matter how a mix-up ended, violence would ruin him. If he killed George; if George killed him; if they merely wounded each other, it was good-by to his dream farm and the happy, honest life he hoped to lead in Talbotville.

Nevertheless, he faced George as a bull terrier faces a mastiff, and waited.

It was the big man who caved at last before Farmer's blazing eyes.

"Oh," George said at last, with a swagger, "if I gotta do it to oblige a friend, I'll come across. Pass over the kale and I'll make the rattler."

"George," said Farmer solemnly,"do you believe in anything? Because I'm going to make you swear on that Bible on the bureau that you'll take that train, never come back, and never split on me. You'll be damned forever if you break that oath."

Farmer swore him.

"One thing more," he said, his face so stern that the big man shrank back a little and dropped his hand to his ready gun.

"If you ain't afraid of the hereafter, you be —— shy of the present. You break that oath, and, as there is a God in heaven, I'll hunt you down and fill you with lead!"

"You don't need to be so fierce, Dan," stammered the ruffian. "I'm a man of my word, I am, and didn't I kiss the book? Gimme the coin. I'm gone."

WHEN Gorilla George had disappeared into the darkness, Dan Farmer sat down again by the table at which he had so cheerfully counted the money to purchase his farm a little time before, and dropped his head upon his hands. The farm was gone, now. All his happiness had vanished with the yegg. Once more a thousand dollars stood between him and freedom.

Was it retribution? Were the shadows of his old deeds formed into a barrier to keep him from honesty and happiness? Was there no rest for the weary, nor peace for the wicked? Once a crook, always a crook? Was there no way out?

Farmer rose and paced about the little room, the turmoil of his thoughts reflected in his drawn face. He had too healthy a mind to believe that the world was leagued against him, but it did seem that some grinning Fate was entirely too ready to stick spokes in the wheels of his plans. How was he to get the thousand dollars that he must have to complete the payment for the farm that became dearer to him each time its acquisition was delayed?

It came to him whimsically that with George gone, he might open Kingdon's safe for his own account. He had certainly saved that jeweler four or five thousand dollars. He ought to have some reward. Not being in a position to claim it openly, why not reward himself?

Kingdon would get off cheaply if he took just a thousand from the safe. Surely he was entitled to that much. This train of logic did not quite satisfy the little man who wanted to be square, and yet, he must have a thousand dollars!

Passing back and forth, his eye fell upon his own reflection in the crazy mirror and caught a flashing point of light. It seemed to recall something to his mind. He stopped and looked closely. The point of light in the glass was thrown from the small diamond pin that he wore in his tie. What was the connection? Diamonds? Diamonds? He had it: Silky Bill!

Farmer knew all about that high-class con-man, though he had never been his friend or associate, for Silky Bill was a big figure in the uppe circles of crime.

Distinguished in appearance and suave in address, it was the habit of Silky Bill to drift, in the character of a wealthy tourist, through the smaller towns where the jewelers were not apt to use locked ring-trays. He would enter a store and make some trivial purchase, and, if the clerk seemed unwary, he would glance over the stock and ask to be shown a tray of diamond rings.

When his inspection was over, one or two of the best would be in Bill's possession and in their places would rest either paste imitations which he procured especially from Paris and which were good enough to deceive any one but an expert, or genuine stones of inferior quality.

To Farmer's mind it was not a very sporting game, for, before the trick could be

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detected, Silky Bill would be far away and even then, there was little to connect one casual shopper with the substitution. To the little man it had always seemed that the risks he took in breaking and entering made the game more fair.

Silky Bill had a side line, too. With no stomach himself for the dangerous work of robbing safes, his keen eyes observed every detail of the stores he swindled, and this information he later sold to those who had.

All this passed through Farmer's mind as he paced the floor. What was Silky Bill at in Talbotville? His old tricks, of course. Suppose, instead of collecting his reward from Kingdon, he shifted the loss to Silky Bill? Bill was no pal of Dan's; in fact, Dan had once come close to doing a spell in Joliet, on account of inaccurate information, false or careless, that Bill had sold to Dan's old partner, "Chicago" Joe.

Bill was fair game; as one who preyed he must expect to be preyed upon. He was as cold and hard as the diamonds he stole, and Farmer, as he thought of despoiling him, felt none of the scruples that had made his robbing Kingdon impossible.

Dan undressed and went to bed. Tired as he was, he could sleep only in snatches. His mind went over and over the long day from the happy promise of the morning to the keen disappointment of the night. He rose early, and, after breakfast, settled down on the hotel porch to whittle, smoke and think.

The proprietor, Major Terrell, tried to be sociable, but found his previously pleasant guest about as chatty as a sick bear. Farmer was very busy with his own thoughts, for it was one thing to decide to make Silky Bill the goat, and another to frame the means.

HE WAS still muddling over the problem when, about ten o'clock, a tall, distinguished-looking man of forty-five, with a sweeping grayish mustache, a rubicund face and a straight back, walked by. His clothes were of the latest cut and he swung a gold-headed stick.

If Farmer had not recognized Silky Bill he would have placed the personage as a retired Army officer. So had many trusting jewelers. The con-man looked so generally arrogant and prosperous that his passage added fuel to the fire that burned in Farmer's distressed mind. He succeeded in working himself up to quite a righteous indignation toward that eminent crook.

When he had passed out of sight, Dan left the porch and walked in the opposite direction to the Palace Hotel, which, five stories high, all white brick and green bronze, was the direct antithesis of the old-fashioned Talbot House.

Farmer strolled in, his plans in a very fluid state. The register lay open upon the desk; he leafed it over. In yesterday's arrivals he found inscribed in flowing capitals: "Mr. and Mrs. William Gilmore, New York," and he saw that they had been assigned to room No. 318. Farmer was sure that this was one of the names Silky Bill used.

"Mrs. Gilmore," he reflected. "Traveling double, eh? Well, that wouldn't be unlike him."

He looked at the key rack, and noted that the key to No. 318 was in its place. Both of the Gilmores were likely out, then.

The elevator was in the corner of the lobby, at some distance from the desk. Farmer marched over and entered the car. Then, as the boy, who had seen him leave the desk, was about to close the door, Dan exclaimed:

"Dog-gone it, I forgot my key! Run over to the desk and get three-eighteen, will you, George?"

George did it without a second thought, smilingly accepted a tip, and deposited Farmer at the third floor. There was no one in sight, and Farmer was inside Mr. Gilmore's room in an instant. It was an ordinary hotel chamber, neatly furnished, with a connecting bath.

Upon the bureau were scattered a pair of curling-tongs, a powder-box, and various other feminine toilet accessories. A light, silk-lined overcoat lay on the bed, at the foot of which stood two alligator-skin bags.

It was to these that Farmer gave his attention. They were locked, but that was a detail which did not prevent his opening them quickly. The first one contained a bewildering assortment of women's garments, which Dan, feeling as though he ought to blush, hastily replaced.

Upon the top of the other lay an extremely competent-looking revolver which Farmer, in the thought that it might be needed, promptly transferred to his own

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pocket. The little man did not approve of shooting, but if there was gun-play on the program, he preferred to be the performer. His unpleasant position at the wrong end of a pistol the night before was still strongly impressed upon his mind.

But it was at the bottom of the bag, within a folded handkerchief, that he found what he had come to look for. In fact, his whole plan hung on the idea that Silky Bill would not carry in his pocket the whole stock of rings which his methods made necessary. In case of an accident, a pocket full of diamond rings would have been difficult for even that personage to explain.

The fruit of Farmer's search was a small case of red morocco leather containing six diamond rings, all ladies' solitaires in Tiffany settings. From the nature of his business, all of Silky Bill's merchandise must be of one pattern.

Farmer was not exactly an expert in precious stones, but he had handled a good many and he could make a very fair guess as to the value of those in the red morocco case. There was one big beauty, which he judged to be in excess of two carats, blue-white and perfect, and two other stones of a little over a carat each.

The other three rings Silky Bill evidently carried to leave in exchange for more valuable ones. Two were set with genuine diamonds of about a carat in weight, but one was yellow and the other showed a flaw. The remaining ring was set with paste. Farmer figured that he could not hope to get more than seven or eight hundred dollars for the lot.

"But that much will help," he said to himself. "Wonder if there's any more loot about?"

As he bent over the bag, he heard the approaching click of high heels in the corridor without. The tapping stopped before the door of No. 318. Some one knocked and a high, slightly hoarse feminine voice called—

"Open up, Bill!"

Farmer noiselessly shut the bag, thinking a thousand to the minute. If he failed to open the door the woman would probably go to the office and there would ensue trouble a-plenty. There was trouble enough as it was, without bringing in the hotel people.

He slid to the door, turned the key in the lock, sprang backward into the bathroom with a leap that would have done credit to a professional acrobat, shut the door loosely, and turned on both faucets over the basin. Then he waited, his eye to the crack.

The woman who entered was young, of full and pleasing figure, and smart from her high-laced blue kid boots to her blue straw toque. Her face still had charm; but the wrong kind of experience, and too many cosmetics, had marred the original fineness of its lines and texture. Now her face was beaming like a painted doll's.

"Shaving, Bill?" she called, as she took off her hat and tossed it on the bed.

"Uh, huh," mumbled Dan from the bathroom, his voice almost drowned by the noisy faucets.

"You better hurry, then. We want to get the next train out and it goes in an hour. Say, I did a peach of a job. When it comes to pennyweighting, even you ain't got a thing on me. I sneaked the best rock in town!"

"Uh, huh?" grunted Farmer again, as though his mouth was full of soap.

The woman had drawn from her gold-mesh bag a Tiffany-set solitaire that blazed with fire as the sunlight struck it. She laid it upon the bureau and began to unfasten her dress, talking all the while.

"I sailed into that good-looking jewelry store—Kingdon's, I think the name is—and say, the rubes here must have money, for they got a dandy lot of stuff. I picked out a hatpin first. The little geek that waited on me was so green I thought he'd croak, but when your little bright-eyes gave him a loving look or two and asked him to please be so kind as to let her look at engagement rings, he turned pink. I let him hold my hand when I tried some on, and before we got through he didn't know whether he was dealing in diamonds or eggs."

She had removed her street costume of blue foulard, and had laid out a traveling suit upon the bed. Then she slipped into a kimono of scarlet silk, untwisted her hair, and began to brush it.

"How'd you come out, Bill?" she called.

Farmer gurgled unintelligibly.

"Bet you a quart of wine you didn't pick up anything prettier than this spark. Thank Gawd, we can get some wine in Savannah. My throat's fair parched. Ain't these jay towns fierce?"

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MEANWHILE, Farmer had tiptoed to the window. The "jay town" did not look "fierce" to him. Talbotville was spread beneath him, with its spires peeping from green trees, and its pleasant homes surrounded by gardens. Had he entangled himself in a trap that would lose all this for him?

He looked about and down. The fire-escape was out of reach. The wall below him was as smooth as the bathroom tiles and the court, three stories below, was of cement. There was no way out except through the room. So he opened the bathroom door and stepped out, not quite sure what he would say or do.

"Say, Bill— Mother of Gawd!" shrieked the woman. "Who in —— are you?"

Before Farmer could open his mouth the hall-door opened and in stalked Silky Bill. The con-man's jaw dropped as he looked from the startled woman in the gay kimono to the apparently embarrassed man. Then his face reddened and he burst into a string of oaths.

"—— you, Marie," he bellowed, "at your old tricks, again, are you?"

Like the bully he was, he advanced threateningly upon the woman, scarcely heeding Dan.

It was then that his inspiration came to Farmer.

"Hold on," he snapped, thrusting himself between the pair. "You got the wrong steer. This is what I'm here for." He stepped over to the bureau and picked up the ring.

"I'm the Palace houseman. We're dead on to you, Mister Silky Bill William Gilmore. I came up to give you the office to move, and nobody was home, so I waited. Then, when your partner blew in, I dived into the bathroom, and listened to her pleasant little tale of how she done Kingdon out of this ring."

"Gave us away, you fool, did you!" Gilmore shot at the woman.

"Oh, you don't need to put in on her," interposed Farmer. "We was wise to you. Now, I oughta run you in, but we don't like trouble around the hotel. I'll take care of this rock. You sling your duds together, and you catch the eleven o'clock. The bus will leave in a few minutes—you better be ready to take it."

While Farmer was speaking, Silky Bill had taken out a handsome pocketbook and extracted a fifty-dollar note.

"Would this help you to have a little blind spell?" he suggested.

"What do you think I am—a crook?" snorted Farmer in virtuous indignation.

"Naw, I think you're a —— fool," retorted Bill, in disgust.

"What you think cuts no ice," grinned Dan. "Are you going to pack, or do I call a harness bull and make a pinch?"

Silky Bill threw out his hands, palms spread downward.

"All right, bo," he said. "You got us dead to rights, thanks to this skirt. We'll vamoose."

Farmer, in affected nonchalance, pushed a chair into a corner and sat patiently while the woman finished dressing and packed her bag. As a matter of fact, he was fervidly figuring what he should say if Bill rummaged in the other satchel and discovered that the morocco ring-case was gone.

A house detective might frisk a crook's baggage, but how could one who had so virtuously refused a fifty-dollar bribe square himself for the appropriation of six diamond rings? He had no evidence that they had been stolen. However, Silky Bill merely stood and looked out of the window, smoking furiously, and the bag was not opened.

When their brief preparations were made, Dan stuck steadily by the crooks, even into the bus.

"Ain't we ever going to get rid of you?" whispered the woman viciously.

"Sure," said Farmer, "but I want to see you safe on the train and wish you a pleasant fare-ye-well."

"If I wish you anything," she retorted, "it is that you break your neck."

When the train had roared away, Farmer went back to the Talbot House, and made monkey faces at himself in the mirror for fifteen minutes. Once more he could see his onions sprouting. He felt no compunction in keeping the ring stolen from Kingdon, for, in his twisted code, it seemed small enough reward for the loss he had averted from the jeweler. As for the other loot of which he had outwitted Silky Bill, he felt exactly as much remorse as a wolf would that had filched a fat haunch from a tiger.

"Savannah for me tomorrow," he told himself. "The scientific sharps say that diamonds and coal are different forms of the same stuff. Now I've got to see if I'm chemist enough to turn these diamonds into nice black dirt—the dirt of my farm!"

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THAT KIND of a COUNTRY

by WILBUR HALL

Author of "Goda'mighty's Pardner," "Grice's Girl," etc.

WHEN Lee Wetherby sold his interest in the Batue River ranch to his brothers and left Texas to go to school, people in Deaf Smith County made various comments. All of the Childress family smiled twisted smiles and said they'd driven him out—that Lee had never had any nerve, and that the Childress-Wetherby feud sat hard on him, nights.

He left, at any rate.

It was more than three years later that Sheriff Dowd, back from Denver with a prisoner, brought first-hand news of Lee. He had worked himself through a mining school, up Golden way, and was running a mine out in Arizona.

Sheriff Dowd also added the information that young Lee was apparently doing first rate.

That night, Chamberlain Wetherby and Dal Childress met on the road near Herford. Wetherby was looking for a dairy heifer that had strayed off, and was consequently unarmed. Probably Dal Childress made some pass about Chamberlain's brother, the newly fledged mining engineer, and they had words. Probably Dal Childress waited until Chamberlain had spurred away in anger, or disgust, and then shot him down in cold blood.

Whatever occurred, the other Wetherbys found their youngest brother, toward morning, lying dead in the road with a bullet through his back, and Dal Childress had disappeared.

ON A SMALL, dry flat between sun-blistered mountains in the southwestern part of Arizona two concrete monuments stand, a mile apart, marking the line between Pima County and Sonora, Mexico. Perhaps by chance, perhaps by design, the adobe house that dominates this flat was built exactly on that international boundary line, and the big corral, west of the house, is half on Mexican soil, half on American.

Between the two halves of the corral—that is to say, along the border line—is a fence, with a gate in it. Cattle driven into the corral from the south are Mexican cattle so long as the center gate remains closed. Cattle herded in from the north are American cattle under the same conditions.

Doña Ysabel Cruse, owner of the house and the bisected corral, up to a short time ago was a respectable Mexican woman; on the surface there was nothing out of the ordinary in the plan either of her house or of her corral. Nevertheless, it was known that the center gate in that border corral often swung open for the transfer of cattle and usually, it was asserted, those transfers took place by night.

It was also observed that, when Mexican *rurales* visited the Doña Ysabel she entertained them in her living-room, which is on the north side of the house, while American soldiers, customs officials, or rangers who called upon her—as they did at times—were offered *tortillas* and *enchiladas*, made by her

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own hands, in the *patio*, which is on the south side of the *hacienda*.

Of her two sons, Francisco, the elder, ran cattle in Pima County, while Luis, her younger, ranged his herds in Sonora. The *doña* and her two stalwart sons were reputed to be very wealthy, but they were not especially popular with Americans. Especially with Sam Husted and his gang of renegades and outlaws—the principal citizens of those bad lands on the Arizona side of the Casa Piedra Flats, where the adobe and the corral stood.

Up to a year ago, or such a matter, the border bickerings that centered about the flat adobe of Señora Cruse were of little concern to any one. Cattle were stolen on both sides of the line, riders were corrupted or killed, the two yearly *rodeos* were attended by innumerable gun-fights, Husted's bad-men from the whole Southwest flourished in the dry cañons and among the forbidding crags of the mountains all about, an easy trigger and a quick draw were the best law and the final court in matters of dispute, and every one gave the region a wide berth and shrugged shoulders at the tales that occasionally ran along the winds from there. Then the MacLaren Syndicate discovered the Ash Cleft mine.

Old Alexander MacLaren, himself, passed final judgment on the property on one of his annual trips of inspection of the syndicate's holdings, and when he returned to Denver he instructed his general manager to take the pick of the new crop of employees under him and send the most promising one down to Ruby to take charge of the Ash Cleft prospect and push development. Guthrie, obeying orders, looked over his younger men and lighted on Lee Wetherby.

"That's a mean country down there below Ruby, son," he said tersely. "I've been watching you for a year and I think you are a happy combination of an engineer and a grown man. You leave tomorrow morning, by way of Tucson. You go with unlimited authority.

"You'll find plenty of credit at the Tucson National and we'll ship machinery from Los Angeles on your order. Take a quart of whisky for snake bite—Arizona's dry now, you know—buy yourself a good dog and a pair of field-glasses, and carry as big a gun as you can drag out of your holster in three seconds less than nothing. Good luck!"

Much more anxious about making good on the property than he was about the dangerous character of the neighborhood into which he was being sent the young engineer went south the next morning, and a week later he had a crew of fifteen at Ash Cleft and had made the acquaintance of Sam Husted, the two-gun man of Cinco Cañon.

IT HAPPENED while he was on the north slope of Sombrero Blanco, looking for water. With his glasses he was painstakingly combing the cañons and slopes around him when his lenses brought into view the ranch-house of Señora Ysabel Cruse on Piedra Flat. Having heard something of the lady's two-part corral and its reputed share in the building of her family fortunes he was examining it in leisurely fashion, grinning a little at its possibilities, when a dry twig snapped behind him. He lowered his glass, wiped it, put it in its case, and, without turning his head, said casually—

"Howdy!"

An abrupt voice behind him snapped—

"When you talk to Sam Husted it's considered polite to look at him."

Wetherby laughed.

"Oh, that's the custom, is it? Anything else?"

He had made no move—ignored the hint. The newcomer stepped forward, after a moment's hesitation, and confronted him, scowling, his thumbs caught in his belt.

"You're —— brash for a stranger, kid!" he growled. "What are you hanging around here for, anyhow?"

All his remarks were generously punctuated with unprintable adjectives and expletives. Lee Wetherby favored him with an inclusive survey.

"I'm opening the mine at Ash Cleft. What are you hanging around here for?"

"I'm keeping an eye on mining men—and imitations!"

"Not very busy, then?"

"I manage to keep in practise."

"With your eye, you mean? Or your trigger-finger?"

"I ain't blinded or crippled, much."

"You look healthy. Down in Texas I used to hear that the way to keep so was to ride wide of other people's business."

"I didn't come up here to start no argument. I been watching you. I want to give you a little advice."

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"The words are all yours—if you don't get careless about the ones you pick."

The gunman spat. The college kid he had followed to bulldoze seemed callous to suggestion and Sam Husted needed a moment in which to shift to new ground.

"Well, here it is, young feller. We ain't used to strangers down in this part of Pima County and we don't hanker to have 'em in here. 'S long's they don't get to nosin' around they can keep out of trouble. But they's one thing they've got to understand—we don't use *cholos* on this side of the line."

"No?"

"No. No Mexicans. You keep to white men, and not too many of 'em, and if they stay at your mine and 'tend to mining they won't be bothered much. I'm just telling you about it."

"I suppose I ought to be obliged to you. I don't know about that yet. What's the objection of this high-minded community to *cholo* labor?"

"They're cattle-thieves, that's the objection. Every black, brown and coffee-colored one of 'em. Old lady Cruse would like to run her gang in here to rustle our steers down into her corral—and over to the Mexican side through her middle gate—and we don't see it that way. We won't have one of the sneaking skunks in this part of the country and the man that brings 'em in goes out with 'em—if he gets out!"

"So, you're a cattle-man?"

"I'm a cattle-man."

"Where's your ranch located?"

Husted colored, under his bronze. He spoke explosively.

"Now, don't get too many idears and questions going, stranger! I said I was a cattle-man, and that I don't want any greasers in here at your mine. And that's all I'm going to say."

Wetherby laughed.

"We'll be saying so long, then, I reckon."

"I'll say so long when I get ready."

"Fair enough. Take your time, Mr. Sam Husted. I haven't decided whether I'm obliged to you for your free advice or not—my hunch is that I'm not. When you've got anything else to lift off your chest though, drop in at Ash Cleft. *Adios.*"

And while the gunman stared, half-persuaded to fire at the contemptuous youth, Lee Wetherby vaulted to his saddle and went sliding off down the mountain toward Ash Cleft Camp.

The superintendent discovered, however, that neither his own inclinations nor the ultimatum of his neighbor played much part in the problem of employment. White laborers—hard-rock men, muckers, tool-sharpeners, roustabouts, cooks and helpers—either would not or could not stay with him. His preference was for Americans, decidedly. But his force, small for the first few months of his work, was out-numbered eight or ten to one by the bullies and renegades of the hills surrounding the mine.

Men would come, work a few days, complain of the heat, or the isolation, or suddenly contracted illnesses of fanciful and grotesque nature, and would leave. Development must go on—the Denver offices of the syndicate had a peculiar and ineradicable prejudice against explanations. Wetherby hired Mexicans.

One night the bunk-house was raided and the inmates taken to the border west of Doña Ysabel's and set free there, faces turned southward. Wetherby, who had been in Ruby signing supply contracts, returned to find the camp empty and on his office door a sign, subscribed with a death's head, reading:

No mex will be stood for in yore camp we got tired telling yo This.

"You'll get tireder!" Wetherby grunted.

Two days later he had a full complement of Mexicans at work again—and he was fired at in the dusk, coming down from Sombrero Blanco Mountain, and only narrowly missed. After this episode he brought a dozen sawed-off shotguns from Ruby and taught his Mexican miners to use them.

Threats, warnings and fearsome messages were sent him, but he threw them into his waste-paper basket and filed, instead, a curt letter from old Alexander MacLaren himself, dourly complimenting him on the showings made on his weekly progress charts. And in a lull he encountered a new factor.

HE WAS sitting in the shade of a scrubby mesquite on a hillside one afternoon studying a grade he proposed to use for a road eastward against the time when he would have milling ore to ship and presently frowned and rubbed his eyes at a vision that, for the moment, he laid to nerves or sun-blindness.

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Coming up the cañon toward him, on a wiry range pinto, her hat swinging from the horn and her long, blue-black hair glistening in the light, a girl rode, easy in the saddle, erect, careless of the tricky gait of her mettlesome mount, and looking straight at the engineer.

Wetherby abandoned his first diagnosis and began to feel for his pulse, thinking of Mexican fevers of which he had heard but of which he knew nothing. The smiling girl, her olive, velvety skin and black eyes proclaiming her nationality, came forward at a trot.

"Oh, ——," Wetherby exclaimed, soulfully, "why didn't I learn good Spanish instead of this hybrid border Mex!"

"How do you do, Mr. Wetherby."

He scrambled to his feet—but neglected his hat in his amazement.

"*Buenas tardes, señorita!* That is—good afternoon! Then you're real, are you?"

"Real?"

"Excuse me. I couldn't believe my eyes, that's all. Won't you climb off a minute. I haven't seen a woman for nine months."

"Mother guessed as much."

"Mother?"

"Señora Ysabel Cruse—Casa Piedra, you know. She says you haven't been there to pay your respects since you arrived."

"But nobody told me Doña Ysabel had a daughter!"

She laughed with her chin up, full-throatedly.

"Shall I compliment my mother by telling her that? Or myself, by telling no one?"

Wetherby's head was whirling—he was no hand at bantering save with fully armed and evilly intentioned renegades who gave orders as to operation and employment at Ash Cleft. The girl before him swung from her pony, and dropped the reins over the impatient pinto's head.

She was Mexican born, but not Mexican. Either true Castilian blood ran in her veins or else one of those marvelous cross-strains of Spanish and Saxon which produce the perfect physical texture and form that is the pride of the Southwest and the envy of the rest of America. There was the slightest drag to her sibilants, the slightest roll to her r's, the slightest broadening of her vowels—but she spoke perfect English.

And, with her background and environment—desert mountains, chaparral, gray dust, heat waves and desolation for the one and for the other, cattle thieves, desperadoes, ruffians and crookedness the most shameless—she was enough to befuddle the senses of any man. She befuddled those of Lee Wetherby, certainly.

"If you'll give me a minute to get my breath back," he said—and stopped.

The girl eyed him with a friendliness that he became aware of, even in his perturbation. He took his hat off to cool his forehead, then remembered his manners, hardly learned in three years at college, and left it off.

"Let's sit down," the girl said—and set the example.

Wetherby dropped a little distance away, but the brilliant sun fell on him and he hitched nearer, looking up to gage the spread of the sparse shade.

"I'm sorry I'm such a fool," he said, with real embarrassment. "But to see a woman, here—and a woman like—a young woman——"

"Go on. I love it!"

"Don't make fun of me. I didn't know there was a daughter at Casa Piedra, but I don't think I would have gone there even if I had. I've been too busy to make calls. And I don't know how much."

"You'd learn, I think," she said judicially. "And as to there being a daughter at my mother's house—there isn't, usually. I was shipped out of this country when I was fifteen, and I have only been home two or three times."

"I can understand that."

"What? Only coming home occasionally?"

"No—being shipped out, as you say. This isn't much of a country for raising girls, I'd say."

"No, I suppose not. But I like it. In another year I'll be of age and then I'm coming back here to live, part of the time."

"You might have a good influence here."

"How?"

Wetherby had been thinking of the tales of that corral on the border line—and of the gate conveniently between the two halves, Mexican and American. But he could scarcely say so. He flushed with confusion again.

"Oh, a woman has a lot of influence on men—and this is mostly a man's country."

"There's mother," she prompted, and he saw that she was watching him.

"Of course," he said, hastily. "I don't know her, but I suppose—that is——"

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She checked him.

"You've heard stories about Doña Ysabel?"

"Well, yes."

"Disagreeable stories?"

"Rather."

"Did you believe them?"

"I've been too busy to think about them." He spoke as man to man. "I have, for a fact. I'm working Mexicans at the mine, and they worship your mother. I've had one or two run-ins with the cattlemen in these parts and I don't think much of their stripe. Between them I prefer the *cholos*."

"I came purposely to talk about that," she said.

"About my neighbors?"

"Yes. You've been honest with me and I'm going to try to be honest with you. Mother is a real Mexican woman at heart. She hates the gringoes. She believes what my grandfather did—that the States stole Arizona and New Mexico and southern California from them and that they are justified in retaliating—with fair measures or unfair. My brothers both feel as mother does—at least they act as though they do. I believe we have gotten rich stealing cattle from Arizona."

Wetherby followed her up.

"That's all wrong, of course," he said, positively. "But I have a notion that your brothers are only stealing stolen steers."

"You've met Billy Pickett and Sam Husted and their gang, evidently."

"Yes."

"They are cattle-rustlers on a big scale. Up to a few years ago they not only stole cattle on this side of the line, but they worked with my brothers who were buying cattle stolen from American *rancheros* in Mexico. You've seen that corral—on the boundary line?"

"From a distance. From the top of Sombrero Blanco, over there."

"That's a good lookout, that mountain. Well, our people used to drive in Mexican cattle, move them into the American corral and send them out through Cinco Cañon by Sam Husted and his cowboys. Then Husted's gang would rustle every hoof that was loose on this side, punch them down into the corral and Luis and Frank and their *vaqueros* would pass them through, rebrand them, and drive them across country to Matamoras. It was a beautiful system."

"Was, or is?"

"Was. Five years ago—about the time I left here—Husted began to double-cross my brothers on shipments and they quarreled with him. Husted's men rode down on the *hacienda* one night and ran off all the cattle there, burned the barns, riddled the house-roof, and shot four or five of our riders.

"Since then there's been open and bitter war between us. Husted keeps out of the way, but he's still stealing cattle, from us as well as from the ranges on the Arizona side. If Frank and Luis steal his— Well." She shrugged.

Wetherby frowned.

"It isn't pretty, is it?" he asked. "I'm glad you aren't in it."

"But I am," she protested. "I spend the money. I know all about their operations. I'm as bad as they are."

"Can't it be stopped, somehow?"

"How? Through the courts? My brothers wouldn't have five minutes' grace in an Arizona court—and if we took Husted or any of his gang into Sonora they'd be shot at sunrise and there would be international complications."

"Your people might sell out—move away."

"Sell? To whom? And as for moving: knowing all the facts, would you move?"

"No, I don't think I would. I'm from Texas."

She smiled.

"I thought you were. Mother hates Texans worse than Arizonans, and she hates Arizonans worse than she does the devil!"

"You said that you wanted to tell me about all this," Wetherby reminded her. "Did you think I could do something?"

"It isn't that. I heard at home that you had been employing Mexicans altogether at the mine. Francisco—that's my oldest brother—Frank said you were having trouble with the Husted outfit; that they were trying to drive you out. And of course we know what he would say about the Mexicans."

"To me, you mean?"

"Yes. He says they are all cattle-rustlers, working for mother, doesn't he? I thought so. Well, I was afraid you might believe that. I love the Mexican people—I love Mexico. She's in bad hands now, deceived by bad advisers. It is easy to stir up hatred against Americans—look at the influence my mother has in that respect.

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But when the Mexican people understand, as they will some day, they are loyal, honest and industrious. I didn't want you to believe that our boys, working for you, are thieves."

"I didn't believe that. But I'm glad you came to tell me."

"Are you? I wanted you to have the whole story. Because things are going to be made pretty hard for you. Sooner or later there will be trouble. And when it comes you will know better how to meet it if you know the facts."

"What sort of trouble do you mean?"

"The Spring *rodeo*. You were here last Fall, but everything was quiet then. Now, there are soldiers—American soldiers—camped along the border, and they will probably be sent down here to protect Husted's crowd during the round-up. Francisco knows all about it—he knows what Husted has done.

"If the cowboys stay on this side of the line there will be no trouble. But they won't. Our cattle are all up in this end of the desert now—Husted will try to run off as many as he can. The Carranzistas have promised us protection. There will be trouble—you can see that."

"Yes," Wetherby said, gravely, "I can see that. I'm sorry. But it leaves me out."

"Don't be so sure," she said. "I can't tell what may happen—I wish I could guess. But if there is a fight along the border, Husted's crowd will take advantage of it to do you some harm, you may be certain of that. And if there are any Mexicans in your camp you may have difficulty in protecting them."

The situation—an undreamed of possibility—looked serious enough. Wetherby saw that. The girl was willing to tell what she knew, she was anxious to be of help, and she promised to send any new information that reached her. They had a longer talk than either of them realized. The sudden dropping of a curtain of shadow over them from the hills to the west warned them at last. The girl rose—Wetherby with her. She put out her hand.

"I've told you too much, perhaps," she said, looking at him with a sudden mistiness in her eyes. "I'm not ashamed of my mother and brothers, even though I don't like their business. And I'm trusting you."

"You can trust me," he said. "And you have put me under obligations to you."

"Don't talk about that. *Adios!*"

She whipped the bridle reins over the pinto's head and swung up before he could reach her side.

"Wait!" he cried. "When am I to see you again? If I come to Casa Piedra——"

"You won't," she flung back, wheeling her horse. "You mustn't. *Adios!*"

And that was her last word to him then.

THIS WAS early in April—the Spring *rodeo* was to begin on the twenty-second. About the eighth or tenth Wetherby, his cook, and five of his hands were taken suddenly ill in the morning and in the afternoon the cook died. Suffering intensely himself Wetherby kept going throughout the day and night, shutting down operations temporarily and sending all the well members of his crew to clean out the spring and flush the pipes that brought the camp its water supply.

He had known from the first moment that it was arsenic poisoning and that it came from the water. Only his gameness and promptness kept his crew faithful—they were badly frightened. Two days later the superintendent went hunting Sam Husted.

He found him nine miles northeast at a line-rider's cabin with another man—a stranger to Wetherby. This stranger, though, gave instant proof that he did not desire to broaden his circle of acquaintances: when the young mine superintendent rode in this man jumped up quickly and retreated into the cabin, cursing. Sam Husted rose, hitching his cartridge belt around.

"Hello, kid!" he called, contemptuously.

Wetherby reined his horse to one side so that the long scabbard hung on his saddle revealed to the renegade the 45-70 carbine carried there."

"I've been looking for you, Husted," Wetherby said, bluntly. "Somebody in your gang poisoned our water Sunday night."

"You're a liar!" Husted spat.

"No, I'm not a liar. I'm a whole lot too good-natured! But there's a limit to patience, and I've reached the limit and a little more."

"All right. It's your say."

"That's what I figure, Husted. You may notice that I don't carry a revolver on me—I don't like 'em. But I'm a sort of shot with a rifle. It will interfere with work

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some, but I'm going to spend as much of the time as I think it'll take for the next few days squatting behind a rock that overlooks the Ash Cleft property. And the first cattle-man from these regions who gets on our preserves is going to go to the coroner with a 45-70 bullet through him. I mean just that. And you can pass the word."

For the second time his back was turned on Sam Husted before the gunman could think of a fitting answer to him or could move to precipitate trouble. He shouted an insult after the mine superintendent, but it was rendered unintelligible by his rage. The man with him, who had darted into the lean-to on Wetherby's first appearance, came out scowling.

"It's God's truth he's a crack shot with a rifle, Mr. Husted," this person volunteered, in a whine.

"You shet your yap till you're spoke to, will you?" Husted shouted, suddenly whirling.

"No offense, neighbor."

"Then put your big fist in your face; I'll deal the cards in this here game, and I don't need advice!"

"You ain't changed your mind 'bout giving me a swing at the feller, have you, Mr. Husted?"

"I don't change my mind. Go after him as soon as you like. But mind about that 45-70 carbeen of his'n."

His companion laughed evilly.

"He won't have time to reach for it when I meet up with him," he boasted. And they drank from his big flask on that assurance.

That same afternoon a long-legged rider from north of Ruby came into the Ash Cleft camp, and introduced himself as Pete Standing, reporting from the sheriff's office at Tucson. Wetherby sent him up to the summit of Sombrero Blanco to take the first watch. Thereafter, turn and turn about, the two kept guard.

But the Husted gang rode around. And the stranger who had been with Husted and who had made his boast was slinking through cañons and along coulees studying the country, which he was seeing for the first time, and making his cold and deliberate plans, under no compulsion of haste.

MEANTIME Wetherby was fighting an unfamiliar longing within him—a longing to see and talk to a woman. At first his symptoms had perplexed him, or he had pretended as much. His eyes would wander southward along the cañon road. His ears were continually deceiving him into the belief that he heard the nervy pinto's mincing steps.

He started at approaching sounds, stared at dust clouds, searched the scarred, hot faces of the surounding hills, dreamed unimagined interviews and dreaming, waked, to lie sleepless for hours. His appetite fluctuated. He found it a task to keep his mind on his work. He unearthed two or three old romances in the post-office at Ruby, bought them, read them with distaste, and yet could not resist turning to them again and again.

He called himself a fool, with adjectives. He persisted, far longer than was reasonable, in declaring to himself that no grown man could have sustained any vital wound in an hour's conversation—he had not even been introduced; he did not know her name. Atop of all she was the daughter of a cattle-rustler, and the beneficiary of organized range thieving. She had laid stress on that point.

But her black eyes, long-lashed, looked into his by night and by day; her soft voice, with its rounded vowels and its sustained sibilants, sang in his ears; the delicate perfume of her was always somewhere about him, elusive, vagrant, but there.

His final hypothesis—he did not see her for more than two weeks—he seized upon and fixed his mind on obstinately: he had been almost ten months in this desolation and he was lonely for a woman's presence. That was sensible—that was reasonable. He forgave himself some of his weaknesses as regards this daughter of La Casa Piedra.

Then a chance passer-by brought the information that Doña Ysabel Cruse had died, suddenly, the night before. Within an hour Wetherby was at the border *hacienda*, had met the burly brother, Francisco, had offered any aid that lay in his power to give, had sent a word to the girl, and had ridden slowly back, his heart heavy for her.

That ride brushed away all his subterfuges, overcame all his doubts. He was in love! He was in love with the girl of the blue-black hair; the great, deep, black eyes; the face that changed from grave to gay, from mystic and pensive to vivacious in a breath, with a word; the tall, straight, supple body of health and strength—in love with the daughter of the border ranch, and though the whole world had been against

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her and the accursed practises of the Cruse family he would have confronted it in her defense and would have taken her side!

That was how much he was in love—he, a Texan, range-born, and bred to regard cattle rustling as equal to murder!

This was on the seventeenth. On the twentieth he rode down the cañon road again and this time found the girl. She was in the *patio*, kneeling in newly turned earth and planting flowers. Her face was a little drawn and her eyes tired, but she smiled at Lee Wetherby with some of her color flashing back into her olive cheeks.

"*Buenos dias*, Señor Wetherby!" she cried. "You come again. It is very kind in you."

"It was the least I could do." Wetherby found his words halting more even than before.

"Francisco told me you were here the day after the *madre* died. He has gone across country with her body, to Matamoras, where her relatives are buried. He will be gone two weeks, at least. I keep the Casa Piedra."

"You? Not alone?"

"Oh, not alone. But Luis is away all day and sometimes half the night. Today he has gone to Cumeral to bring the soldiers."

"For the round-up?"

"In honor of Sam Husted's round-up, yes. Day after tomorrow, you know."

"But you shouldn't be left here alone."

"Perhaps not. But what was to be done. I could not go with Frank to Matamoras—there is too much disturbance in Chihuahua and Sonora. And Sam Husted only steals cattle—not women."

"I wouldn't trust him or his gang to limit themselves that way."

The girl—she had gone back to her planting—struck a trowel into the warm earth with a sudden symbolic blow.

"Pah!" she cried. "Do you think I fear those beasts? No more than coyotes! They are the same stripe!"

He thought that she was right—pictured her at bay, with some of the Husted renegades facing her, stopped by her blazing eyes and heaving chest. But the picture faded and gave place to one of Husted himself, foul-mouthed, desperate, despicable, ruthless.

"You shouldn't be left here this way!" he repeated, almost angrily. "It's wrong to take the chance."

She laughed at him, but softly.

"Are your *Americano* neighbors so dangerous, then?" she mocked.

"They're a bad lot. I'm glad I came down today."

"Don't worry about me, Mr. Wetherby. I despise renegade gringoes; I don't fear them!"

There was nothing gained by following that tack. Wetherby asked about Doña Ysabel's illness. She had been taken suddenly with some sort of stroke, the girl answered. She was old and had suffered a great deal. In a way it was better for her that she was out of this continual turmoil and conflict.

"I never knew my mother very well," the girl said. "She was harsh with me, not because she had a bad heart, but because I was in the way. I was different from her. She understood my brothers better. Her death was an unexpected pain—but it will pass. Do you understand me?"

"I think so. My father was that way—I didn't know him much. When he died I felt sorry for my mother and my sister. That's why I think I see how you feel."

"It will make things easier, in a way, too," the girl said, in a moment. "Frank is sick of this—he may not come back from Matamoras at all. Luis will stay—he is a fighter and he loves this everlasting clash with the Husted outfit. Sooner or later he will kill Husted or be killed himself. But meantime I shall go back to Los Angeles and stay, probably."

"I thought you were coming here to live. You said——"

"I meant to Mexico. Yes, I think I would want to be in Mexico somewhere, part of the time. But not here at Casa Piedra. I hate it here!"

Wetherby was awkward in negotiating an opening for what he wanted most to say—what was trembling on his lips to be said momentarily, but was held back by the nature of their conversation. Lunch-time came and she made him stay and gave him an *enchlada* she had made herself, fragrant with herbs and *chilli* and with great lumps of tender browned beef steaming in its heart.

Tortillas of white corn, a mug of buttermilk, and a sweet of chocolate and citron that he had never tasted before completed the meal. They ate in the *ramada* shading one side of the *patio*, and a caged mockingbird sang to them. A squat Mexican peon served them and it was from him Wetherby caught the girl's name—Conchita.

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Afterward she rolled a cigaret for him, using a sweet, thin corn husk and black tobacco, and lighting it for him with a quick touch of the match that set the tobacco glowing but did not allow the dry husk to flare up.

His hand trembled when he took the cigaret from his lips and his voice was thick when he spoke.

"It's dangerous for you to do that," he said, self-conscious and aware of the triteness of his opening.

"Not dangerous!" she said, flashing a quick look at him.

"Dangerous for me," he added.

"Why?"

"Because it makes me want to say something—something I'm going to say to you some day—but that now is the wrong time for."

"Wrong?"

"Don't you think so?"

"I don't know. I'm not in the secret yet, you see."

He looked at her with a glance so level that she put out a hand. He caught it. All his self-control was dissipated in a breath. He clutched at her hand desperately, so that he hurt her. But she did not wince.

"Not in the secret?" he cried. "Conchita! Look at me!"

"I am looking," she said.

"Can't you see—what I—what I am going to say?"

"Some day!" she bantered, but her voice, too, caught a little.

"Now! I have already said it. At least you know what it is!"

"Yes," she said, breathing quickly. "I know what it is. I've known ever since you came this morning."

"And you didn't send me away? You weren't—mad?"

She laughed at his boyish word.

"I wasn't mad, señor—wait! Oh, wait! How strong you are! How quick——"

Presently the mocker above them flew to his topmost perch, balanced a moment, and broke into a sudden, piercing, exultant trill of melody. Wetherby looked up, laughing. The girl ran her white hand along his sleeve to touch his cheek.

"He knows about us!" she cried, her long lashes wet. "It's for us he sings. But, dear one!"

"Conchita!"

"You are so abrupt. You have not considered. Do you remember that I do not even know your name?"

With proper apologies, then, he told her —so that was all right.

AS HE rode away from Casa Piedra at sundown his eye was caught by a cloud of dust kicked up in the south and he stopped his horse and looked back. Under the cloud were horsemen, and the horizontal rays of the sun glittered on rifle barrels along their straggling line. For a moment a queer flash of resentment burned in him—he had the Texan's antipathy for Mexican soldiers and he could not forget that, on the day after to-morrow, these Carranzistas might be in a clash with Americans.

But his resentment passed. After all there would be no trouble if the Husted gang remained on their own side of the line. And the Mexican *soldados* were coming partly to protect Conchita Cruse. A warm flush went over his whole body and his heart leaped!

At the Ash Cleft camp there was mail. The letter from Guthrie, in Denver, he opened first. It read:

> Have your note asking about enlisting. Have a heart, Wetherby. Our production at Ash Cleft will be absolutely essential to the Government the minute you are ready to ship ore. If the thing gets bad enough and you're needed we'll let you go. For the present take my word for it that you are doing your bit.

There was more, relating to the imminent arrival of an assayer and two mill men, and asking about machinery contracts that were in the air. Wetherby merely glanced at it and put it aside for the moment.

The second later was dated, Herford, Texas, and the young superintendent's eyes lighted. Home letters were rare—very rare. He ripped this one open and read:

> Chamberlain was killed last week, Lee. The —— Childresses got him—in the back. Dal Childress it was. Afterward he beat it. Lucky for him.
>
> Better keep a weather eye peeled. He may come your way.
>
> About did mother up. Rest all as usual.
>
> Steers gone up to fourteen-fifty on the hoof and going higher.
>
> Don't worry—we'll take care of the Childress outfit before we get through.
>
> Yr. affectionate Bro.,
>
> HENRY WETHERBY.

He put down the letter and stared off into the night. Dal Childress! It was he who

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had been with Sam Husted that day at the line-rider's cabin—the man who had jumped up and gone into the shack when Lee rode in. He had found out where Lee was and had come straight for him—after shooting down Chamberlain, their baby brother. Cham had been fourteen when Lee left home—that made him less than eighteen now. At least, under eighteen when he died. It was hard to believe . . . .

"Hello, Lee!" It was the guard who had come down from Tucson. He dropped to a framed timber, stiff from riding. "Two of 'em rode by this evenin'," he volunteered. "Husted, I reckon, and another fellow. Short, with a light beard and a Texas hat. On a flea-bitten sorrel. I never seen him before."

Lee Wetherby looked up wearily.

"No, he's a stranger here," he said, looking at the letter beside him. "Name's Dal Childress. I'll 'tend to him."

"You look petered out, Lee." The friendly young guard rolled a cigaret, watching the face of the superintendent. "Rid far today?"

"No, Pete. It isn't that. It's a lot of things."

His plans were instantly made. From his dunnage bag he took a big revolver, one that an elder brother had given him, cleaned and loaded it, and slung it in a shoulder holster, under his shirt. He couldn't afford to be killed now. There were more reasons for living than he had ever had before—Chamberlain's foul murder, the need of him on this job of his, and a girl. His eyes swam. Things doubled up in life in a funny way, at times. All this, on him, within a few hours. And the round-up, with its possibilities, on Monday.

Meantime, however, there was much to be done. Conchita Cruse had said that, if trouble broke on the border the Husted gang would probably take advantage of the mêlée to even up with him. That was probable. And certainly not many hours would elapse before Dal Childress furnished a clue to the reason for his presence in the region.

Wetherby told Pete Standing something of what he expected, omitting reference to Conchita and to the murder of his brother. Between them they laid out a plan of defense of the camp if an attack came, and two Mexicans were included in their confidences and given a watch each.

"Nothing will break before Monday, maybe later," Wetherby said. "But we might as well get into practise. And you boys can tell the other hombres whatever you want to. They aren't afraid of Husted's crowd—not since I brought down the sawed-off shotguns—are they?"

"He ees note afraid, señor! W'en he come we geeve heem ——, *muy pronto!* Don' you be worry from us-s boys; only look out af-ter yo'selfs!"

"*Bueno! Gracias!* Hike along now and have all the hombres look their guns over and slip three or four shells in their hip pockets."

Sunday was as quiet as a sheltered pond, and on Sunday night Wetherby rode south to Casa Piedra. But his capricious lady would not see him—she sent word that she was entertaining *el capitan* of the Carranzistas, Juan Ruiz, of Chihuahua, and that she offered her compliments to Señor Wetherby. Lee frowned, twinged by his first pang of jealousy, then grinned at the *peon* who brought the message and turned to go.

As he did so a hand flashed from a high, barred window at his right, and a red rose fell to his feet. He called softly; crossed to the wall of the adobe. But heavy brown curtains hung motionless over the window and no sound answered him. He picked up the rose, put it into the cuff of his gauntlet, and presently was riding northward again.

"Spanish blood," he mused, half-aloud. And her mysticism and romance pleased him inordinately.

The camp-fires of fifty *soldados* glowed in the clearing off to the southward and he heard sounds of plaintive, high-pitched singing. What chance would these tricky, lazy, dreaming Mexicans have with a handful of real Americans, or even with the renegades of the Husted type, he thought. And he hoped that he would not see them in action, if action came on the morrow.

HE WAS awakened at daybreak by the clatter of shod hoofs from up the cañon and went to his cabin door in time to see a squad of mounted troopers picking their way toward Ash Cleft from the hills to the northeast. He had slept soundly, dreaming a little, vaguely, of an olive-skinned girl whose white teeth, red lips, and flashing, deep, black eyes were framed in blue-black hair, and for a moment he gazed with amazement at the uniformed men coming.

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Then he remembered. It was Monday, the twenty-second, the day of the Husted *rodeo*. And suddenly his heart leaped strangely. On a lance carried by a corporal in the van was a small silk flag—the Stars and Stripes, that he had not seen for months. He knew enough of border troopers to know that the banner was outside of regulations—it was a whim of the cavalrymen. Then he saw that they were negroes—Tenth Cavalry, probably, from over toward El Paso.

They laughed and joked as they rode, the sergeant in the lead alone riding with dignity befitting his responsibilities. Negroes—but American troopers!

They asked their way, rode south, and disappeared down the cañon road. Wetherby chafed. For an hour he tried to keep at his work. From a cliff to the east, where Pete Standing was perched, watching, came a message that the Husted outfit was beginning to beat up the coulees and to drive cattle, in straggling groups, toward the Piedra flats.

The round-up was to be focused there as the only available clearing in the vicinity. Husted and his crony, Billy Pickett, had not yet been sighted, nor had the stranger with the light beard who hailed from Deaf Smith County, Texas. Their very absence was ominous to Wetherby.

At half-past seven he saddled his pony, examined his revolver and hid it in his shoulder holster, slung his stubby 45-70 in its saddle scabbard and started by a roundabout route for Sombrero Blanco. Something drew him. He left Ash Cleft camp to Fate.

Sombrero Blanco—the White Hat Mountain—is an abrupt hill that dominates the country around Casa Piedra and the Cinco Cañon region. From its rock-piled summit Ash Cleft could be seen in the dry cañon, the railroad could be faintly traced miles to the north, and Casa Piedra lay almost below. From where Wetherby finally ambushed it was a clean seven hundred yards to the adobe of the Cruses.

Lee did not know why he came—why he ensconced himself in a cranny safe from observation, nor why he nicked up his rifle sights to one thousand yards. There was suspense in the air, for him. With his glass he could see the various characters in the play that was about to be presented to him.

One by one he picked up the Husted riders, sometimes singly, sometimes in couples, working their little strings of steers and early calves slowly toward the Piedra Flats below. Four or five herders were already there, with a small smudge of restless cattle surrounded. Up to the right, on a low mesa that sloped down to the flat and the round-up, the negro troopers lolled, most of them dismounted, two or three with glasses, watching.

Half a mile away, on the other side of the line, the Carranza soldiers, on their poor, half-starved ponies, rode in and out through the brush, calling to one another, and shouting occasional excited messages. The adobe itself might have been tenantless. No one appeared there. But Wetherby thought he made out two or three horsemen in a clump of scrub mesquite to the east, and he saw a dozen sleek steers browsing near them.

In that line corral, on the Mexican side of the border fence, was a good-sized herd. They looked almost like bait in a trap—as though Señor Luis Cruse were daring his old enemy, Sam Husted, to make a try for them! But the morning passed and the play continued as a comedy only—the armed forces watching each other, the cowboys pressing their work heedless of the tension.

It was three o'clock before Lee saw Husted, and it was only minutes later that the trouble broke. The desperado rode with his pal, Pickett, and with the bearded man. Wetherby had time to get his glass on this man—it was Dal Childress, murderer of his brother, Chamberlain, beyond any doubt at all. Lee watched them. They came circling down from the east, over a low hill, driving two wild young steers ahead of them.

Wetherby saw what the troopers below him could not—that Pickett rode around the two frightened steers and cut them southward. In a moment they were over that boundary line and with shouts the three riders went after them.

At that moment two other men, mounted on fast horses, came pounding straight down the line from the east, and ahead of them were a dozen fine big steers. This little herd picked up the two whom Husted had been rushing and the whole group raced southward, sighting the Cruse cattle browsing just over the edge of the flat.

Before any of the other actors in the

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piece could catch their cue Husted, Pickett, Childress and the two cowboys who rode behind had swung south, surrounded all the Cruse cattle within reach, and were sending them headlong northward, toward the American line.

The coup had been carefully planned and skilfully executed. Very few witnesses would have been able, in the rush, to say just how many cattle ran across the line from the north, nor how many were now being driven, urged by shouts and pistol shots, back on to American soil.

Lee Wetherby knew that the dozen fat short-horns driven in by Husted's two flanking riders were Mexican cattle—they had the appearance of having been rounded up just out of range and driven in to cover the onslaught. And it was certain that there were now in the herd being whipped northward at least two-score head of Cruse stock!

But when they had crossed the line a safe distance still another rider appeared suddenly from the brush and headed them abruptly westward, toward the round-up herders, and in five minutes they were surrounded there and brought to a stop, intermingled now with Husted's.

Meantime, however, four riders had come out from the scrub mesquite to the southeast of the adobe house, and three shots were fired in quick succession. It was a signal, pre-arranged, for instantly the Mexican soldiers deployed and came forward at a lope, half of them heading east and north and bringing up along the line almost in the front door of the Casa Piedra. They stopped there only for a moment. Then, at a shouted order, half of them cut across the line.

The daring of the American renegades was so quickly followed by the movement of the Carranzistas that the first brush was brief. A volley of shots toppled two of the Husted herders from their horses and drove the others back. Husted's horse, a big white, plunged and fell. Billy Pickett, Husted's companion, backed out of the mêlée, firing recklessly.

The other riders in the outfit followed impulse and discretion, some charging in and firing, others taking cue from Pickett. The negro troopers, probably under definite orders not to cross the line, moved slowly downward, not yet raising a rifle.

One long minute sufficed to change the complexion of the situation completely—the whole Husted herd was stampeded southward by the Mexicans and went thundering across the Flat to disappear in bunches and by twos and threes into the chaparral beyond; the Husted crowd was scattered and worsted, and the Mexican soldiers, shouting and firing aimlessly in every direction, were taunting the *Americanos* and executing a sort of mounted war-dance about the big corral.

Wetherby, picking up his glass, found Sam Husted and Dal Childress. The former was mounted again—on the first horse at hand—and his cowboys were rallying to his screamed orders and blasphemy. Seeing the negro troopers trotting up from behind, Husted called to the others and charged the Mexicans. The latter met them with a volley that dropped half a dozen of them.

But Wetherby caught his breath. The same fire had spread, and he saw, with a sinking heart, that two of the troopers under that little silk American flag were weaving in their saddles and going down also.

His anxiety for Conchita Cruse he had managed to assuage. It was probable that she had been sent south, out of range, by her brother, but even if she were in the house its thick adobe walls would embed all stray bullets and stop them. Now he could not think of her at all. His blood was up—the trifling emblem of striped and starred silk had been fired on by *Mejicanos*, ancescestral enemies of Texas, the State of the Alamo!

He rose where he was and for a moment thought of riding straight down to join those troopers. But his impulse was caught by his judgment. He could not possibly make the distance in time to be of any service. He did not belong there, either. And from where he was hidden that blunt carbine of his, with its long, soft-nosed bullets, would reach out for him if it were needed. He crouched again, rested the rifle barrel on a rock, and waited.

NOT for long. The troopers, superior to all orders in this emergency, charged suddenly. The Mexicans fired, made an attempt to stand, were swept backward, and fled. The negro troopers pursued. If the sergeant, standing in his stirrups ahead of them and waving his revolver, were ordering them back, he was

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wasting breath. They went on after those panic-stricken Carranza soldiers and disappeared, their shouts reaching back. And the sergeant followed them.

Wetherby looked down at the adobe house and the flat. In the wake of the exultant troopers Husted and Dal Childress, with two or three others, had charged in, and Husted was already struggling with the gate chains on the corral. Just as he freed the fastening and swung the big gate open to release the milling steers within, Don Luis Cruse and eight of his men came in, on the run, and at the first brush Husted fell.

The Americans and the Mexicans clashed. Evenly matched in numbers their duel became a hand-to-hand fight. Dal Childress struck down the big *vaquero* who had picked him, and turned to fire pointblank at Luis Cruse himself. Cruse swung his horse aside, grappled with an American and the two went down.

The furious battle swayed back and forth. Childress, caught in a corner by two Mexicans who had freed themselves from their antagonists, was making a game fight—all three using their gun-butts. Then Wetherby saw a Mexican soldier came softly from some hiding-place around the adobe, his revolver leveled.

So sudden had been the encounter, so desperately did both sides fight about that fateful border corral, that the issue was decided against the Americans even as the unexpected reinforcement arrived to add a third to the pair attacking Childress. And at the same moment the Mexican appeared, Wetherby's quick eye caught the movement of mounted men beyond—the negro troopers, returning at a hand gallop. The Cruse gang in the open who could take flight did so.

The three at Childress, brought to close quarters against the adobe and unable to see the cavalrymen, were the only ones who remained. In another moment they would have had him down—the soldier with his drawn revolver was only waiting for an opening when he could fire, at three or four yards distance, without jeopardizing his countrymen.

Lee Wetherby saw the charging troopers. He saw Childress, son of the feud-enemies of his family through three generations, murderer of his own brother. But he saw, with those hurrying troopers, the fluttering gleam of red and white bars and of white stars on a field of blue. The men attacking the wretched Childress, three against one, were Mexicans—Childress was an American.

As he looked down his black barrel and caught the bright point of his forward sight dead on the creeping Mexican with the revolver there below a thought of Conchita Cruse stung him. But his hand was steady and his eye clear when he pulled the trigger. The Carranzista against the adobe wall flung up his arm and his revolver was hurled wide as he pitched to the ground. Childress, breaking away, ran into the shelter of the wall and the troopers of the Tenth gave him unexpected asylum.

IT WAS half an hour before Lee Wetherby, riding down from Sombrero Blanco, came into the clearing of Piedra Flats. Don Luis Cruse and Sam Husted lay within reaching distance of one another, both dead. Billy Pickett had fled. Such others of the renegades and of the Cruse outfit as could escape had done so, the situation being too complex for any of either party to stomach. But the colored sergeant had arrested Dal Childress and he stood now, unarmed, bleeding from a shoulder wound, distressed and sullen, while the trooper read him a lecture.

Wetherby, pulling up, heard the last words of it.

"An' so Ah'se gwine tote you back to de captain, Mistah Texas, an' let him git head-an'-tail to dis yeah business. We done seen you-all ridin' dem steers in from de souf, and ef dem *cholos* hadn't done bust loose an kill Jerry White an' Milt Bessing, Ah'd 'a' let you an' you cattle-rustlin' pahdnehs fight it out you own selves.

"What fo' you think de captain done sent us down hyah—to fight you battles while you-all run off all de steeh's in Sonora? Tain't our business, nohow. You country gwine pertect you—da's what she gwine do. But she ain' aimin' to do nuffin' for you when you up to sich scandalousness. No, sah. Das de kind o' country she is, Mistah Texas, an' you kin jist prognosticate on dat while you's waitin."

Childress had attended to these precepts, until he saw Lee Wetherby ride up. Then, his face pale and his hands working, he fixed his eyes on the young man's face, panic-stricken with fear. Before Wetherby could speak he broke out, desperately:

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"Lee, don't look at me that way! I know what you think—you think I plugged your brother Cham. It was a accident, I swear to God it was, Lee——"

"Oh, dry up, Childress," Wetherby cut in, bruskly. "I heard what the sergeant said to you—and I've got a little to add to it. No, don't break in, now. It'll go easier with you if you listen."

"I'm listenin', Lee."

"You'd better. I know you Childresses—you're a sneaking, cowardly lot of ambush fighters. But that's all over now. I've tried for four years to forget that feud, and I hope that it is as dead as the boy you shot in the back three weeks ago near Herford. What I want to tell you now is for the good of your rotten soul."

"I'm going away from hyer, Lee——"

"I know you are. You're going quick, too. But I want to tell you where you'd better go. Half an hour ago I saw a Mexican sneaking up behind you with a revolver dropped on you. In another second he'd have had you. That's certain. I killed him."

Childress uttered a cry.

"With a high-power rifle? I heard it. It was your old 45-70?"

"That's it. I knew you'd killed Cham and yet I saved your life. Do you know why?"

Childress shook his head, his lips pursing.

"Then I'll tell you. I'm on the other side from you in this fight—I know Husted and his gang and I knew what they were up to today. I'm glad they got what was coming to them. And I ought to have let you get yours. But I couldn't—because you're an American. You were fighting Mexicans, and they had the drop on you. It was a sight of that trooper's little silk flag that saved your life—that's the kind of country you've got."

"That kind of a country?" Childress repeated, mechanically, but without meaning.

"Exactly that kind of a country. I think probably what I did today has cost me more than you'll ever know of—more than anybody'll ever know of. I think it has cost me my happiness. But I couldn't help it. I was an American, fighting for the flag, for that minute—and when that's the kind of a country you've got my advice to you is to get in now, when she can use you, and fight for her yourself! That's all."

He turned to the sergeant, who was blowing his nose loudly and trying to grin. "Take him away, Sergeant—and see if the captain will give him a chance to enlist, will you?"

Childress had the point, now. He opened his mouth to declaim his readiness—a readiness not the less certain because of the black troopers who surrounded him, nodding approval of the suggestion that had been made. But neither Childress nor the soldiers had a chance to speak.

Lee Wetherby, eying the dead Cruse a few yards toward the corral, and seeing what a wreck had been made of his sudden dream, turned, longingly, but without hope in his face, toward the adobe house—La Casa Piedra. Then he stopped, stone still, his lips white. In the door stood Conchita Cruse, her eyes streaming, but a proud lift to her head, and her hands outstretched toward him.

"That kind of a country?" she cried. "It's the kind of a country that I want for mine, Lee. Will you take me to it?"

And when he took her, his heart standing still with wonder and unbelief, those dusky troopers behind him let out such a yell as can come only from the hearts of free men made glad for a countryman.

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GABOREAU the TERRIBLE

A Five-Part Story
Part IV

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Gaboreau," "Murder!" etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form

I will torture you for six months. Then kill you.
G.

One night several weeks after I had received this strange note I paced the dark, rainy streets with thoughts of its writer uppermost in my mind. I knew that "G" stood for Gaboreau and that Gaboreau made no idle threats. Yet I was not afraid. Clever and powerful as I knew Gaboreau to be, I felt that I was his match.

Suddenly from the shadows staggered the slight figure of a boy.

"German spies have murdered me," he whispered, and fainted in my arms.

I looked at him closely. He seemed almost cut to pieces. His features were aristocratic and unmistakable French.

I did not call the police. Perhaps you will think that I took matters too much in my own hands. Yet I knew I was justified. I knew the bungling efforts of the police. And if there is anything I detest it is a German spy. I was determined to seek out the Teuton devils who were behind the attempted assassination of this boy. My years as professional gambler and my experience in combating the fiendish cunning of the crippled Gaboreau had put me up against stranger situations than this.

I carried the boy to a door near by and rapped. A pale girl with blonde bobbed hair opened. A few words explained the situation. I left the boy in her dingy room and went for a taxi.

A blow over the head with my automatic persuaded the reluctant chauffeur of the first car I met to put himself and his motor at my disposal, despite the shrill protest of his passenger, a hard-faced over-dressed woman.

As we carried the wounded boy into the car, a man came out of the shadows, looked at the lad and gave the women a stare of recognition.

It was apparent that the two knew more than a little about this strange affair.

Determined to sift the matter to the bottom, I forced the man to get into the car and gave the chauffeur my address. The pale little blonde, who said her name was Bessie, came also. On the way to my house the man whispered to the woman, in German—

"What will H say?"

AT HOME I found another message awaiting me.

You will find arsenic in your coffee-can in pantry. This is to show you I hold your life in the hollow of my hand. Some day I will close that hand.
G.

I sent for Dr. Roberts to attend to the wounded boy. Then I started my cross-examination of the woman who had been the limousine's passenger.

"Who is H?" I asked.

"I won't tell you."

"Speaking of initials, what do you think G might stand for? Gaboreau, for example?"

I had taken a long chance and had won. She was frightened speechless. The name of the powerful crook was a word to conjure with. By skilful employment of it I elicited from the woman the information that H was a German agent.

"I was going to keep an appointment with him where you stopped my car," she said. "Mr. Smith, the man you made come along with us, is working for him also."

Believing that fear of Gaboreau would keep her from doing any harm, I let her go. She had to drive her car herself. Her chauffeur was dead drunk.

George Barton, my butler, had seen to that. A few rye highballs had made the chauffeur very loquacious.

"Said his name was 'Bad Bill' Condon," remarked George. "The lady's name is Leonore Musset and she lives at 5-A Kingston Apartments."

I turned my attention to Mr. Smith, who had been sitting in the dining-room under the watchful eye of my mute Chinese, Yang Li.

"Ever hear of Gaboreau?" I began.

He had. The effect upon him of that name was more startling than it had been upon the woman.

It was but little trouble to get his story. H was at war to the knife with Gaboreau. Why, Smith did not know. H had "been interested in" the boy who now lay wounded up-stairs. The boy's name was Jean Latour. Smith had been following him for some time. That night he had seen the boy going toward the place where H had made an appointment with Smith. Two men had come out of an entrance and stabbed the boy about five minutes before I came up.

More than that he refused to tell. He did not know anything about the boy he had been following, he said.

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I let him go and went up to where Dr. Roberts sat by the boy's bedside.

"Dangerous, but won't die," muttered the physician in answer to my question.

"Handsome boy, isn't he?"

"Boy,——! It's a girl."

I did not sleep that night. There was too much to be done. I wrote a note or two and used the telephone a few times. I had much better allies than the police could be. I could call upon men like George Barton, who was as dignified as a bishop and as strong as a Jap wrestler—and whose finger-prints were in every police station in the country; men like the mute Yang Li, who was an artist with an eight-inch knife that had a blade like a razor.

The next morning Vivian, my wife, who had been visiting my sister, came home, bringing my nephew Rob. It required a little explaining to account for the presence of the wounded girl and her nurse, and for the blonde Bessie, who had stayed overnight. George had dismissed the servants after the coffee episode and had filled the house with some villainous-looking creatures who I knew were acquaintances of his chosen against the time when I should have need for a strong bodyguard.

That night there came a telegram.

At nine o'clock there will be a shot through the window and you will need another statue on your mantel. Sooner than you expect a shot just as accurate will be aimed at you. G.

It was then twenty minutes of eight.

DINNER that night was served by "Black Mike," as forbidding an individual as one might find in a month's search of prisons. George had carefully coached him for the occasion, but he forgot most of his tutelage and addressed himself almost exclusively to Bessie:

"Little more Adam's ale, miss? Have another sinker? Aw, g'wan. There's——"

Crash! Every one jumped up. I looked at my watch. Gaboreau had shot the statue—three-quarters of an hour ahead of time.

During the excitement I saw Yang Li beckoning me, and I followed him to the garage. There I found my chauffeur, Jerry Kelly, standing guard over a man who crouched in a corner.

"Yang caught him prowling around the house and brought him here 'bout half an hour ago," said Jerry.

At first the fellow refused to answer my questions. But skilful use of the name of Gaboreau, mingled with some vague threats, soon gave me his story. His name was Robert Henshaw, and he was in the employ of H. He did not know anything about the shooting.

"I was sent to America by the German secret service," he said, "and when Bernstorff was sent home I was attached to H. He told me to get into your house and find out what I could. Said you were close to Gaboreau."

I felt that Henshaw might be useful to me later on. So I forced him to write a compromising letter which put him pretty well in my power, and then let him go.

Jeanne had been getting worse. I went up to see her.

"I must go to my uncle," she whispered faintly as I leaned over the bed. But those were the only coherent words she spoke.

That night came another telegram.

You will be dead inside of a week. G.

Early the next morning I kept an appointment with a man from a waxwork shop. He measured me carefully, as for a suit of clothes, and sketched a remarkable likeness of my face.

"Your order will be filled by tomorrow noon," he promised as he left.

The telephone rang. It was Henshaw.

"I have been doing a little investigating, Mr. Everhard or Richmond, or whatever you call yourself," he said, "and I don't believe either of those names is your right one."

"Who am I, then?"

"You are Gaboreau!"

He went on to back up his statement by a series of remarkable deductions. He was a clever guesser. The only trouble was that he guessed wrong.

My library was in darkness as I strolled into it about nine o'clock that night. As I reached for a light I heard a slight movement near the window.

"Who's there?" I cried.

No answer.

I shot. Immediately I was sorry I had done so. For as the light flashed on I saw Bessie clinging to Black Mike, on whose broad chest was forming a bright stain. My bullet had interrupted their wooing. Thank God, the wound was not fatal.

As we carried Mike up-stairs the doorbell rang. It was Vivian and Rob. Vivian's key would not fit. Some one had been tampering with the lock.

Rob, who had youth's enormous appetite, made a bee-line for the kitchen. A moment later he came dashing back. His eyes were wide with horror as he gasped:

"The kitchen's full of dead men! And blood—everywhere!"

I WENT into the kitchen. There, lying in the blood which had poured from their half-severed throats, were the bodies of three of the men whom George had hired to protect me.

But one thing could be done. Hastily George and Jerry were summoned. We carried the bodies out to the limousine. Jerry quickly altered the license-plate. Then we sped out through the dark, deserted streets toward a lonely district of the city.

We had gone but a little way when I saw a car in close pursuit. We turned a sudden corner and I ordered Jerry to stop dead. The other car rushed up and stopped beside us.

There was not much of a fight. In a few minutes our pursuers became our prisoners, and the corpses were transferred to their machine. We sped away just as a policeman came into sight.

We took the men into my cellar and turned on the light. I saw that I had captured Condon, Henshaw and a third who said his name was Gregory.

"Hello, Henshaw," I said, shaking him by the hand.

His companions stared at him in surprise and suspicion. This was as I had planned. In a short time I had them believing that Henshaw had double-crossed them.

"You dog!" shouted Gregory at Henshaw. "I'll get you for this!"

I took Henshaw into another room.

"I'll talk," he gasped, "but for God's sake don't

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let those fellows get me. They got three of your fellows tonight."

"Who did it?"

"A fellow they call the 'Butcher.' One of H's men."

"You think I am Gaboreau?"

"Yes. So does H."

"Then why doesn't he try to kill me?"

"He wants to find out where the gold is."

"What gold?"

"You know."

"Yes, but tell me your version of it."

I felt that at last I was going to discover the reason for the war between Gaboreau and H.

"Well, you know that H is a sort of paymaster for the German secret service in this country. He had about a million and a half, in gold, in his possession. It was packed in little boxes and stored away in a room under the guard of six Prussian reservists.

"Then Gaboreau got on to it. A week ago he backed a van up to the house and took away gold, reservists, and all. Later the reservists were found one by one, dead."

Here was a new angle to the affair. I let Henshaw go. I knew he was too frightened to try to harm me. And some time when he had an appointment with H I expected to keep it for him.

Before I went to bed I gave George an order that must have startled him considerably.

"Order seven loads of manure at once," I said, "and have two of them spread on the lawn to-morrow. Be sure to have the lawn well covered."

Then I went to bed, with Yang Li watching by my window.

NEXT morning Doctor Roberts permitted me to talk to Miss Latour. I found her sitting up in bed and taking warm milk and toast.

"My poor uncle must be nearly insane with worry," she said. "He is a cripple and can not leave his wheel-chair. He used to be a colonel of chasseurs, and was paralyzed by a bullet during the Franco-Prussian War. How he hates the Germans! My parents were killed at Nantes, and he is all I have left. Won't you go tell him where I am? He lives at 6430 Fenelon Avenue."

"Of course I'll tell him," I promised, as the nurse signaled that the interview must end.

"The dummy is here from the waxworks, sir," said George when I came down-stairs.

We dressed the dummy up in one of my suits, and I drilled a bullet-hole in the left temple. George supplied some blood to make the wound realistic. The thing had a startling resemblance to what I imagine my corpse will look like. We placed it in a reading-chair by an open window and, summoning Jerry and the limousine, I set out for the house on Fenelon Avenue.

Half an hour later, I stood in a great room and faced, across a broad mahogany desk, a man whose bulging, intellectual forehead was a strange contrast to his puny body and withered legs. This man was Jeanne Latour's uncle. Also, as I had suspected when the girl first told me her story, he was Gaboreau.

"Well, Everhard," he snapped, "where is my niece?"

"At my house. I have come to take you there."

"Take me? You fool. You'll never get out of this house alive!"

He lay back in his chair and directed a stream of curses at me. I knew it was done to distract my attention from some threatening danger and glanced about.

Less than three feet away was a monster python, its huge body coiled and ready to strike. I jumped back, bringing both my automatics into play. The bullets smashed into the great reptile's head again and again. I killed it, but it thrashed about so in its death struggle that it almost killed me first.

When finally it lay dead Gaboreau crawled from an immense drawer in the desk, in which he had hid himself.

"Everhard," he began, "a man that's easily trapped is no good. I want you to work with me, to be my man. Name your price. Is it money?"

I laughed. "When I get through looking over your papers," I said, "I think I'll know where to put my hands on a million or so."

Instantly his master-mind saw that I knew of his war with H., and his next words were a threat—

"Everhard, if you know von Hartmann, you had better shoot me now."

For an answer I threw both my guns to the floor. Gaboreau reached out his hand and I took it, and thus we pledged a common hatred for the spy von Hartmann, whom I had known as H.

Gaboreau still insisted that he was going to my house of his own volition and in his own car, but, outwitting his attempts to knife me, I picked him up as I would a child and carried him to my limousine. Jerry drove us home and there Gaboreau was taken to see his niece.

We were to have the girl's story later. Living at her uncle's house after the butchering of her parents, she had often heard the old crook crying his need for a man he could trust. Anxious to be of some use, she had clipped her hair and offered to do a man's work.

Gaboreau trained her carefully. Then he sent her to win the confidence of the woman Leonore Musset. Jeanne played the double rôle of a girl and a boy, supposedly brother and sister, who were eager to aid the German cause. The Musset woman must have become suspicious, for one night she directed Jeanne to go to a certain address by a certain route, and on her way there she had been stabbed and I had found her.

As Jeanne lay in bed and told Gaboreau what a kind and generous gentleman I was, a shot reverberated through the house, to be followed by some minutes of silence and then the cry——

"Mr. Richmond has been killed!"

Yang Li, crouched in the shadow of the portières, had seen two men enter through the door with the tampered lock and creep toward the dummy. One was the Butcher; the other carried a gun. Silently Yang glided from the shadows and pressed his knife against the fellow's throat. The fool shot, and missed. A silent, bloody battle followed, which ended only when the torn corpses of the Butcher and his mate lay stretched upon the floor.

Into the room crawled Gaboreau, in time to see what he thought was my mortally wounded body in the reading-chair.

But I am omitting my part in the evening's events.

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VI

I DROVE with a great deal of haste for Fenelon Avenue, and being anything but competent with a machine, I had more narrow escapes on that ride—and so did some other people who narrowly got in my way—than in a normal year of my life.

As I approached Gaboreau's house I very nearly became excited, for there were many people in the street, many machines, much running about and a high blazing red light that illuminated the scene. The house surely seemed to be burning, and I blamed myself for having hurried away with Gaboreau; and I thought that some of Gaboreau's men, seeing that he had been carried off—though I had used what precaution the situation permitted to make it seem that he was only being carried to a machine he wanted to enter—had quickly taken the surest means of obliterating a place that might furnish evidence.

But though I was mistaken in that conjecture, I was more surprised than ever. Some deviltry that I could not understand was going on. Driving to the curb almost a half a block away from the house, for I could not have got much closer because of the machines and group of people that continually increased, though the hour was rather late, being around ten, I got out and went closer. A crowd will spring up rapidly any place in a city where there is excitement, or particularly the red blaze of fire, and folks were tumbling from all the houses, and also were coming from all the streets 'round about.

The yard was lighted with those flares that moving-picture people use in taking films at night, a kind of blazing torches that burn fiercely for some three or four minutes; and flares were being continually placed and lighted so that there was a sustained, intense light. I counted at a glance three men with their tripoded boxes cranking away on the scene before the house, and found another focused on a large truck, a moving-van truck, which was too wide and high to drive under the archway of the front door and had been left at the curb.

I am afraid that my pulse beat a little quicker as I saw what was being loaded into that van. A row of men, some twenty I should judge, had been stationed like the volunteer firemen of a bucket brigade before engines and hoses were used; or more precisely they were like the row of coolies with which ships are coaled in Japan where the little baskets come up from the barge and are passed from hand to hand until they reach the bunkers; and these men were rapidly passing little wooden boxes, shaped and in size something like shoe-boxes.

The boxes came from hand to hand through the opened doorway, where men were evidently stationed in the hall too, and were passed rapidly down the line and piled into the van.

But the row of men was not all. It was a most remarkable picture that was being taken, actually being taken, for I spoke with a camera man who idled by his tripod and he said that he was getting ready to shoot the departure of the van. I did not talk to him as though I were one of the crowd. I questioned him with the appearance of authority, for in the first place I did not want a flippant answer, and in the next I thought I might as well find out then and there if these were actually agents of von Hartmann—I knew von Hartmann was back of it because of another feature of the so-called set—or merely men hired ignorantly of what was being done.

"Here, you," I said, "is your camera loaded?"

I did not know whether or not that is the technical term for having a camera ready, but trusted to my manner to "get," as picture folk say, the remark "across."

"Yes, sir," he said briskly, looking at me with the air of one waiting for instruction. "I am waiting for the van to start."

"What kind of a picture do you think it will make?" I inquired with the trace of a patronizing air.

"Well, since you ask me, I think it'll be a —— of a film."

And he told me why in plain words.

It seemed as if they were wasting a precious lot of film on this stunt of passing an endless number of boxes down a line of men, all extra men picked up and brought out for the job. It had been running already for almost twenty minutes and every second of it had been taken except when the cameras would have to reload, but even then the action didn't stop. Funny way to make pictures. Not only all that, but the actors out there were n. g.

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They had been pulling a common ordinary love stunt for all of twenty minutes, just kissing and breaking away, and looking at each other, and kissing again.

Of course the public liked mush, but no house would stand for all that lip exercise. There had been a director around for a little while but he had gone into the house and hadn't been seen since. There would be some grand old "cutting" when this picture was assembled, and the film wastage would be enough to put on a real five-reeler. But all these camera men had been hired and real money paid, and it wasn't up to them to ask questions, but to shoot.

"Well," I said as I moved away toward a policeman, "we'll see if we can't get a little real action into this picture when our stunt is due."

He looked at me rather surprised, but I went on.

I talked with a policeman. I got out of him that he had investigated when the picture started, because it looked "kind-a funny;" but, he guessed it was all right—and besides, everything was fixed O. K.

"I know, I know," I said, slipping him a bill, as though what he had told me was of no interest and I had been merely paving the way to lead up to my proposition. "But you can help us out a bit, a little later on. Do you know the plot of this story?"

He said that he did not.

"This is it. It is a war story—German spies and that sort of thing. The head of the German spy system in America has a lot of funds in cash, gold and currency, stored in boxes, small ones, so as to be convenient, and so that he wouldn't have to deal through a bank. Well, a gang of crooks grabs this money from him and hides it in this house—this one here. Old Latour is really the head of the gang, understand?

"The spy finds out that the money is here, and brings in a lot of men he has picked up off the streets to cart it away. Well, now along comes a fellow who knows both angles of the plot, and he cuts in on the action. Makes a lone-handed play. We want to make this part of it realistic, and to show just how he gets away with it. You can help out wonderfully well. Will you?"

"How's that? Great story. I sure want to see it when it is shown."

Then I suggested a way in which he could assist materially.

He agreed. I gave him another bill and asked him to keep his eye on me for the signal; but in the meantime he set about arranging the scene in a way that seemed best suited for making the picture plausible.

I AGAIN gave my attention to the love scene. It was a peculiar thing indeed. In front of the house, just so as to be out of line of the men passing the boxes, stood Henshaw and Leonore Musset making love. They would kiss and pull away, wave their arms and talk dramatically with soundless lips, then come into a long, tight embrace.

Obviously they were stalling for time and it was wearisome work. I could see perspiration on Henshaw's face. The little love scene was to make the crowd of gapers think a real movie was being taken; and probably very few, if any, of those sightseers had any more idea of how a picture should really be taken than I. I would not have known better except that I knew why the picture was being taken, and also had the expert criticism of the camera man.

I would have liked very much to be able to talk with Henshaw for a few minutes and ask him a few questions. One of which would have been to determine whether or not von Hartmann was in that house. I could hardly think that he would have left such a daring and important venture to be entirely carried out by others. The fact that he had picked up extra men—when I was later to learn that he had plenty of "reservists" that could have been impressed into service—shows how confident he was that the scheme would succeed; but it was also a fact that greatly encouraged me to try a little scheme of my own.

But if I had actually known that von Hartmann was in that house I think I should have gone in after him.

I was also inclined to wish that I had not carried Gaboreau off. If he had remained to meet von Hartmann and his gang—well, there would have been something to happen with Jacques behind the panel and the monstrous python to be accounted for. It was almost as if Gaboreau had expected some such visit from the German terrorist: Gaboreau did things in a mysterious way, and he seldom explained anything.

I wondered what this gang must have

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thought when they came upon the dead python and the wrecked room. Evidently their plans had been well laid; and I doubted not if von Hartmann himself were not in the house, that he had trusted men there, and that their purpose was to murder whomever they found. After all it was a simple plan, as all daring plans are.

The moving-picture idea was excellent as giving a license to work at night and before the eyes of a crowd. The presence of a crowd would alone imply a guarantee that nothing wrong was being done: perhaps that was what had eased the policeman's mind of all suspicions.

I would also have liked to ask Henshaw where those boxes had been stored and how they were discovered. I later learned that they had been heaped each on the other, as brickwork is made, under a high staircase, and then they had been papered over—apparently in an effort to prevent any one from discovering them. As I have remarked many times, Gaboreau had a faculty for thinking deeper than other people; yet even at that I do not believe he ever expected von Hartmann would conceive of anything so daring as the moving-picture "stunt."

I was of the opinion that von Hartmann wanted to keep the recovery of his own money as much of a secret as possible from his men, for though he needed some assistance that could be trusted, he could do very well by engaging extra men and hiring a van to drive away to whatever place he wished.

I was to later learn—and this is really what emboldened von Hartmann—that he had heard Gaboreau was practically alone and that none of his agents ever came near him. That last was far from true. But von Hartmann had heard it: and strangely enough the report had been circulated at Gaboreau's instigation!

What precautions von Hartmann had taken with regard to keeping secret the disposition of the contents of the van I did not know. Perhaps none. He could drive the van wherever he pleased, say to his reservists that the contents were "explosive." If it should have been learned that the contents was money no doubt the prices and expenses would have risen alarmingly.

I looked the situation over carefully and wished that I knew more about money so that I could estimate the amount that had already been conveyed into the van. I could not hope to wait until it had all been stored for the element of surprise was what I counted on. I did not know whether the driver who lolled in the seat was a trusted man or not, but I was sure that the fellow inside of the van who did the arranging was. He was not only a different type of man, but kept a sharp lookout at the boxes as they came down the line of hands.

The police had been about what I had suggested, and I thought it was getting nearly time to do something. I assumed more of an air of having some authority over the "picture" and engaged the driver in conversation.

"All ready to start?" I asked.

"Huh?"

"All ready?"

"Ain't tru' loadin'."

"I asked you if you were ready. Don't you know this van goes in the picture? Has to make a dash?"

"Didn't know nothin' of it."

"You do now. Start the motor. Tell that fellow inside you're just testing if he gets curious."

I was taking considerable of a risk with that remark, for if the driver had been one of von Hartmann's gang he would have cried an alarm. But he was not.

"That feller," he said, thrusting a thumb over his shoulder, "was to show me where to go."

"True. He will go with us. Start your motor. Get it good and hot. See that clearance the officer has made through the street for you? Well, when I give the word you are to start up and go as fast as you can. The camera will be on you—taking the picture."

"I get yuh, Steve."

He started up the motor. The man inside yelled, and the driver yelled back, voicing the explanation I had put in his mouth.

"Shut that thing off!" the man screamed, much excited between trying to keep his eye on the driver and keep it on the row of boxes.

"Go ter ——," the driver answered casually, giving me an elaborate wink.

"Camera set?" I asked the camera man who had given me so much valuable information.

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"In a jiffy," he answered and got busy. "What about the flares?"

"Never mind. They'll light up in time. You take this picture."

And as I talked I kept an anxious eye twisted about to see what manner of men were overhearing me, for there were plenty of gapers about, who, sensing my important air, seemed to think I was preparing a new feature for the picture, and all being pretty well tired of the one they had been watching were ready for another. The man in the van was shut in except from one side and busy, and besides I was too far away for him to hear.

I was just coaching a couple of by-standers, and slipping more of my bills into their hands, and explaining how they were to push over the man who stood on the boards that had been laid from the van end to the ground, then swing the doors shut and lock them, and do it quickly and roughly if necessary because we wanted to make the picture realistic, when a fellow plucked me by the sleeve.

"Is it all right?" he asked quickly, anxiously.

I looked hard into his thin, narrow face, and said nothing. He was a little man, dapper and perky, but his face was the face of a born crook.

"I'm in the know," he assured me, but his assurance left me no wiser than before.

"What?" I asked.

"Who the fellows are that are pullin' this stuff."

"Who are they?" I asked in turn.

He smiled indulgently and seemed to say by his silence:

"You know, and can tell me. I'm square."

"And how do you know that I am not one of them?" I inquired with real interest, dropping my voice so that it barely reached his ears.

"You are Everhard."

"Well?"

"And they are planning to get you—right. So you can't be one of them."

"Quick, tell me how you know all this—or rather, why you think it."

"COME here," he said, and took me a little to one side. "I know you're all right, Everhard, 'cause I once heard the Old Man say he'd give any two men he had for you. An' the Old Man thinks a lot o' me, too. I've been after this Dutch crowd for two months, an' I've spotted H's hangout. The Old Man told me when I did not to report to nobody but him. See? I hotfoot it after this crowd for two months, an' today I piped the joint. Got my lamps on the Big Pretzel hisself, hanged by my toe-nails with an ear glued to a window open at the top an' I heard him pass the word to give you a ticket to hell.

"Said somethin' about having a key to your front door an' not wantin' any reasons why it didn't come off. When I knew I had H in his dug-out I got away soon as I could an' lands here in about three jumps. I'm just turnin' in when I see a car comin' out and Jacques on the front seat. I catches a look inside an' see you an' the Old Man. Then I sets down in the shade to wait for the return trip when up blows this Dutch crowd and starts somethin'.

"I think it must be all right,' cause you can't put nothin' over on the Old Man, but I'm hangin' around wonderin' whether to tip off the Twins or set tight, then up you comes. It's all right, ain't it?"

The Twins evidently referred to the two brothers that Gaboreau perhaps still had high in his confidence.

And here was reinforcement from an unsuspected, but none the less welcomed source. Besides, if he had von Hartmann located I wished to cultivate his friendship.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Eddy, Gerald Eddy."

"Oh, yes, I've heard of you."

And I had. He had the reputation of being a nervy little sport who once got a friend of mine into a crap game and trimmed him; and my friend, not being so much of a gentleman as I could wish, tried to even matters by flashing his inspector's badge and placing Eddy under arrest. Of course, the inspector intended to say that he had only been collecting evidence against Eddy by shooting craps.

But he did not get a chance to say it. Eddy had flashed a gun, stood the inspector, together with the rest of the small crowd against the wall, and departed. I had had no idea that he was on Gaboreau's staff. I only knew that he had been compelled to lay very, very low for a long time. But as Gaboreau had a weakness for nervy, quick-witted men, it may have been that

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incident that called his attention to Eddy's capabilities.

Certainly I was quick to use them.

"This H—is he here in the house?"

"Sure ain't. . I've seen 'em all go in. One fellow with a mustache an' a broad hat looked a little like him, but H don't wear a lip-teaser."

"Listen. We're stealing this van. They've got some stuff here that Gaboreau did not expect them to carry off. And we are to take charge. When I give the word, bounce inside there and keep that fellow that is stacking the boxes quiet, very quiet. I'm going to swing the doors to and lock them. Understand?"

"Do I?" he grinned.

I stepped away and looked the situation over.

Everything seemed ready.

"All right, Officer!" I cried, at the same time signaling to the men I had tipped to help make the scene realistic.

There was a rush, a couple of men were knocked over, the boards flung away. Eddy with a bound was inside the van and I had a glimpse of a surprised face, mouth opened to yell, as he leaped at the man who much outweighed him. But the yell did not come. The doors closed. The lock snapped home. I shouted to the driver and the van lurched forward even as I swung myself up into the seat beside him.

Indeed, there was yelling and tumult behind, and a general mix-up such as is probably not wholly cleared up, or at least explained, yet.

The officer, thinking to aid the picture in which I was interested, and made willing by the size of my present, had cleared a way among the machines that blocked the street so that the van could dash forward. He not only had done that, but he had instructed—at my suggestion—the drivers to pull into the road and block it as soon as the van passed. This, I explained, was to cut off pursuit, for the people behind and in the house would set up a great cry to stop the van—which was only a part of the story and to make this big scene as realistic as possible.

They did set up a great cry all right. The camera man who had been detailed to cover the departure of the van probably cursed me soundly for not having the flares lighted so he could take the picture; but I did not have time to remain and explain. The hue and cry was tremendous. But the machines, both through the joy that people take in helping out with a picture, and through the suggestion of the officer, closed into the road and blocked it effectively; and of course everybody thought that all the fuss being made was only very fine acting.

The H crowd no doubt had plenty of cars on the scene, but they could not get any of them into action for some time, and cursings, expostulation and explanation would do no good for many minutes. By that time we would be far away.

We were rumbling fast. I had no idea that there was so much speed to be got from a van. I heard a thumping and bumping around inside and peered through the driver's loop-hole, but could see nothing.

"How's everything?" I asked a bit apprehensively.

"All hunky-dory, thank you. This fathead makes a fine cushion!" came the sprightly answer.

But there were howls of protest from the cushion.

"What are you doing to him?"

"Nothin', nothin' at all. Just a little jitsu entertainment. Got him scratchin' the back of his noodle with his elbows."

I WAS far from comfortable. It is no easy matter to dispose of a furniture van as one might with a roadster, though it is not particularly easy to track one that has a good five minutes start. But what to do with the thing now that I had it was a question. I did not care to undertake to drive it myself. I would be like a child riding a behemoth. I did not wish to have the driver know what disposition I should make of the boxes for he would undoubtedly be questioned later.

There were, I estimated, something over two hundred of the boxes, probably two hundred and fifty. However I am a strong believer that when in doubt it is wise to do the simplest thing possible, and the simplest thing I could think of was to drive on to the first vacant lot we came to and dump them.

"Well, guess that ought to satisfy him!" the driver exclaimed with satisfaction when I told him that he could slow down.

"How's that?"

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"The big fellow that was runnin' the show, he said he'd give me fifty dollars if I'd get away quick and keep goin' fast."

"It's been worth it," I agreed with a smile, very well pleased to discover that the preparations made by the Germans had fitted so well into my scheme of things. "There's no use hauling this junk we've got here around."

"Yes, he told me them boxes was property to be delivered to the studio. Made 'em hefty to make them fellers that handled them earn their money. Funny thing about the movies, the way they do things."

"Isn't it, though?" I said as I went again into my purse.

I usually carried a fair roll of money, having got accustomed to keeping plenty of funds when I was a regular patron of the poker table; which was fortunate, for I had been going pretty heavily into it that night. I gave him the fifty dollars and ten more as an inducement to work fast in unloading the van, when, by turning up an alley we were able to come on to a vacant lot instead of being compelled to unload at the street curb.

He may have thought, and no doubt did think, I was doing a peculiar thing; but he really could not be suspicious as long as I was dumping the boxes right out in the open. They must contain junk if no more attention is given them than a load of rocks.

The four of us went to work, for the German had to help, which he did with right good-will when he saw that the stuff was being unloaded on to a vacant lot, and was spoken of as well as treated like rocks; and it was only a matter of minutes before the last box was tumbled out.

I sent the driver on his way rejoicing, and primed him to say, if he should be stopped and questioned, that the boxes had been delivered at an address about a mile from Fenelon Avenue. I don't know whether any one lived at that address or not. I don't know whether or not there was a house. I only know that it would have served very well, if they heard of it, to attract the Germans to a locality somewhat removed from where I did not want them.

And I don't know how much suspicion I may have relieved the driver of by telling him that I was playing a joke on one man in the company who had said it was preposterous to suppose a furniture van could get away, like it was supposed to do in the "story," without being traced; and that pretty high stakes really hung on my being able to do that little thing.

When the van left Eddy asked—

"What's the joke, Mr. Everhard?"

"Joke?"

"Sure. You're not doin' this for your health. You're puttin' somethin' over on Wilhelm. Poor old feller! Seems like everybody's takin' a crack at Willie. Wake up, Dutchy, an' get in the conversation. Why ain't *'Gott Mit Uns'* on your belt buckle? Huh? What's the lay, Mr. Everhard? Shall we cut off this Kaiser-hocker's toes an' watch 'im dance or Belgianize him all to once?"

Eddy was not so bloodthirsty as he sounded, but the uncomfortable prisoner did not know that, and tried to enter into a long explanation about what a good American he was and that sort of thing. But I had something else to do than listen to Eddy's repartee.

I had left a perfectly good roadster in front of Gaboreau's house and wished very much that I had it; but I did not care to send Eddy after it, for though he might not have appropriated it—and I did not think he would—I was afraid that he might by chance find some of Gaboreau's men around the place, perhaps some one who knew what was in the boxes; in which case I would be in a fine kettle of spoiled fish.

I did not care to leave him with the prisoner, for the prisoner might prove to him what it was the boxes contained and the issue might be embarrassing, even if the two of them did not conspire to make off with as much of the money as they could carry.

So I sent Eddy to telephone to my house.

With his nervy impudence he knocked at the first house where he saw a light, explained that there had been an accident and could he use the phone? He could, certainly.

The result was that inside of a half-hour Jerry drove up in the limousine and we set about loading the treasure into it. I saw that two, perhaps three trips, would be needed to carry the boxes. I was very nearly in the fix of the man who had a goose, a fox and a sack of grain and room to take only one at a time in a boat across the river. If the fox and goose were left together, the goose would be eaten; if the

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grain and goose were together the grain would disappear. I did not want Eddy to have an idea as to what was done with the boxes.

Jerry briefly told me what had happened at the house, and my peace of mind was not increased by the knowledge that newspaper and police attention had been directed toward it; but I thought that I understood why von Hartmann was anxious to put me out of the way. He had found out that the hiding-place of the boxes—I am tempted all the time to speak of it as "gold"—was not in my keeping, so there was no longer need of letting me live lest the secret of the treasure's concealment be lost.

As a matter of fact, it was his shrewdness, not mine, that discovered the place of concealment. As became a terrorist, particularly a German terrorist, his methods of sudden death were very effective, and he was not without cleverness. The manner in which he had obtained a key to my front door showed a degree of imagination almost as brilliant as the way in which he had effected a raid on Gaboreau's home.

I am not much good at planning out clever stunts. Even my dummy had not worked out as I had thought. I have usually been able to think quickly and act promptly on the spot, but not to lay out a campaign of strategy.

So now I took Eddy on the seat with me, and drove off leaving Jerry to watch the other boxes and the prisoner.

"I say," said Eddy as we got under way, "What's all the shindy over these boxes?"

"What do you mean—shindy?"

"You know. What's the lay? What's the use of the things? What've they got in 'em?"

"To be absolutely honest," I said, "I do not know. Gaboreau seems to think they are precious, and it is largely due to him that I am taking so much interest."

"You mean the Kaiser crowd nearly got somethin' the Old Man didn't want 'em to have? Don't believe it. Don't believe it. Bet the Old Man loaded 'em on the Dutch bunch."

"It happens," I said, trying to take his mind off the boxes, "that the Dutch are not Germans."

"The —— they ain't? What are they then? What's that song about the 'Dutchers abernicht de Allies?'"

I did not feel competent to undertake an explanation.

When we had come near to my house I mentioned that there might be a policeman or two on the scene.

"Then it's me for the tall woods," said Eddy. "I'm always tempted to run when I see a cop, an' I generally yield to the temptation. A certain cock-eyed inspector has passed the word that my presence 'd be awfully welcome at his station, but I just naturally don't like to graft off the city—gettin' board and room for nothin', that way. I'm very shy—at times."

"Well, suppose that you get off a couple of blocks from the house and keep on the shady side of the street until I go ahead and find out if the coast is clear."

"I've got to see the Old Man tonight. He wants to put the hooks into this Dutch bunch."

"I know. And so do I. But it is getting late and Gaboreau isn't feeling very well. A number of things have rather upset him."

"I can cheer 'im up."

"We'll see. You had better jump off here and wait up the street a half-block or so until you hear a whistle."

"Well, don't make that whistle like a copper's call or you never will catch me. I got a bad heart, too. Misses about three jumps ever' time I hear a cop's whistle, so you do 'Dixie,' or somethin' that is catchy instead of runny. Get me?" he asked cheerfully as he climbed down and scooted into the shadows.

I DROVE straight into the garage, and I was evidently expected, for George and Rob came out together. They began telling of what had happened, and it was amusing to see the way George complimented Yang for his marvelous knife work.

"I always knew, sir, that Chinaman was dangerous. My word, but I am glad I never spanked him, as I have been many times tempted to do!"

"Where is he now?"

"He is camping outside of the room where Gaboreau is with the young lady. She certainly brought us bad luck——"

"Nothing of the kind!" Rob interrupted. "Miss Latour had nothing to do with it!"

"And the nurse, sir," George went on. "I found her tiring of her duties and put

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her in a room with Mike and Miss Bessie to rest. She was quite worn out."

"So much so, I suppose, that she was preparing to leave and tell what she had seen and imagined to the wide, wide world?" I asked.

"Indeed, I would not be surprised if those were her intentions. But she has changed them. Yes. She has changed them. Mike is feeling very bad sir, and he wanted something to amuse himself with, so I gave him one of your guns. An automatic. I forgot to take the shells out, unfortunately. And he has very nearly frightened the poor lady out of her wits, sir. Sick as he is, he told her that if she got within ten feet of the door that the thing might go off accidentally and hurt her."

"And Dr. Roberts?"

"He left about twenty minutes ago," Rob replied. "Said he'd show up in the morning."

Then I put them to work unloading the machine, and when I confided to them what the boxes were, they worked with a vengeance, and I helped. It did not take long to dump them out, and I left them lying by the side of the garage—for the time.

Taking Rob with me, and explaining what I wanted him to do, we went around in front.

"You keep Eddy with you in your room. Listen to him, but do not believe anything that he tells you. Only remember it. Let him drink if he wants to and help him into bed if he grows weary, but don't leave him. And tell him nothing."

I whistled "Dixie" as well as I could, and pretty soon he came up. I introduced Rob as my nephew and said that as the coast was clear he could come in and have a drink or two.

But it was not for nothing that Gaboreau had picked Eddy as one of his trusted men. He wanted to see Gaboreau, and said that he would not take a drink until he did see him. In fact he seemed on the verge of growing suspicious. That would be bad. I was counting on him to take me to the haunt of von Hartmann—if he really knew it. I did not want him to get in touch with Gaboreau: for one thing, I did not care to have the Old Man know that I was alive. So I stopped long enough to play a trick on Eddy.

I managed to speak to Rob without being overheard; and to convince Eddy that Gaboreau did not want to see him that night, the three of us went up-stairs and stopped in the hall and before the door where Yang had been squatting. He stood up as we came. I could not say to him what I wished with any one listening, but I took his thin, bony hand and pressed it hard while I did compliment him. He grinned in embarrassment.

Then Rob flung the door open and disclosed the interior of the room while he stepped inside, and said something to Gaboreau, who sat in a chair by the window, his hands crossed under his chin with elbows resting on the arms of the chair.

"No," the shrill, fierce voice shouted. "I won't see him. I don't want to hear what he has to say. Tell him that. No. This time of night. No. I've other things to think about. Blunderhead. No. Do you hear me? No!"

Eddy and I stood in the hallway, back from the door, but we could hear very plainly and see too. I looked at Eddy's face. He was convinced and puzzled.

When Rob came out and shut the door, against which Yang placed his back once more, Eddy said:

"All right. I'll take that drink. I've seen him. Funny, though. But nobody can put anything over on 'im. Not much. He knows what he's doin'. I don't."

Then I left Eddy in Rob's company, and went on my way.

What Rob had told Gaboreau was that Jacques wanted to see him and explain how it happened that he had been caught off guard.

I returned with the machine to the vacant lot, got the remainder of the boxes, Jerry and the German. When we had gone some distance, I told the German to climb off and hike. I had no further use for him, and did not care what sort of a tale he carried to the ears of his master.

George, Jerry and I worked the remainder of the night in the strangest sort of way.

We placed the boxes end to end along the arbor, and against the garage, until all of them were laid out, then covered them with manure. When I heard that the boxes were in existence I thought the chances of my getting my hands on them would be pretty good; and I could conceive of no better way of hiding them than right out in the open under a layer of manure.

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The simplest thing is always the best; for though I could have stowed them in the house, there was nevertheless the chance of having it raided. But I did not think there was a reasonable chance of any one searching for them out in the open, not though they were traced, as I had elaborately guarded against their being so traced, to my premises.

It was very nearly dawn when we had finished; and as we had worked without lights of any kind, and been as noiseless as possible, lest the attention of neighbors be attracted, George remained to await the break of day and cover any boxes that we had failed to give proper attention in the darkness.

The arrangement was really very neat. No one would be likely to suspect, unless one knew exactly where to look. But I had prepared to garrison a room overlooking the back and, if I caught wind of any poachers on my "loot," to install Rob there with a pump-gun. No one would be likely to carry off my treasure then.

I went up-stairs and found Eddy comfortably drunk and Rob asleep. A fine way for one who wants to be an aviator to obey orders, I told him after I had shaken him into consciousness.

"Who was asleep? Can't a fellow shut his eyes when the light hurts them? Nothing could have happened around here without me knowing it. Not much!"

"What did Eddy tell you, anything?"

Rob looked at me in a rather funny way and shook his head.

"What's the matter? What have you been doing?"

"Nothing—there was nothing to do. We just had a little crap game," he finished uneasily.

"How much did you lose?"

"How'd you know I lost?"

"How much did you lose?" I repeated.

Then he blurted:

"All I had and a couple hundred more that I expect you to loan me. Don't look that way about it. You know I'm good for it. What's a couple of hundred?"

"Nothing at all. Nothing. Only I object to having my sister, who is also your mother, assure the Recording Angel that I am responsible for all your craziness. And if you ever have any more money you want to get rid of, just throw it into the street and let the newsboys scramble for it. Don't shoot craps with strangers—not when Eddy's the stranger!"

And with that I left him.

I WENT into Vivian's rooms. She was in bed, but sleep had not touched her. She said nothing, but looked at me reproachfully from her deep, dark eyes. I felt a little conscience-stricken, which is a most uncomfortable way to feel, particularly for me; so I quickly explained everything, omitting however some of the details in my encounter with Gaboreau, for I had no wish to harrow her.

"And do you think it is worth it?" she asked quietly, in a colorless voice, not at all like hers. "I died tonight just as much as I ever will. I suppose I am getting old, Don. I am nearly thirty, and, oh, I am so tired of it all! I know you will say—or you can say—that I used to get you into trouble. But I am tired of having trouble. I want to get away from this house. And that awful old man! He is not human. He is not, I tell you.

"It is terrible. I feel drenched in blood. I don't dare go to sleep. I know I shall wake up screaming. I want to get away. Let us go to Africa, Australia, any place just so it is far away.

"You say you want to put Gaboreau in an asylum? I wish he would die! I wish I had killed him!" Then flinging her hands quickly to her face she cried: "Oh, I don't mean that! I don't! It is terrible to see a man die groaning and screaming. And what do you want that money for? We have enough. I sometimes wish we didn't have any. We were happier then. I would rather you were gambling than this. What do you want to steal it for?"

"Steal it?" I asked. "My dear, it isn't stealing in the first place. It belongs to the Germans. And I want it to give to the Red Cross and to the French and Belgian Relief Fund, anonymously of course. That is my idea of poetic justice—the German spy fund dedicated to food and milk for French and Belgian babies. I have that money and I am going to keep it. And Vivian, you must remember that this is war! Von Hartmann and his crowd are worse than soldiers. If it were not for my stiff knee I would have been in the Army long ago. When I caught that girl on the street as she fell against me she said:

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'Monsieur, the Germans have killed me!'

"That is why I did what I did. And I am better fitted than the Secret Service to go through with it. They are more capable than I, but I do not intend to put von Hartmann in a detention camp for the duration of the war. They would. And even as much as I have reason to wish Gaboreau were dead, I can not help respecting him. The worst you can say of him is that he is a lunatic. Von Hartmann is a German spy. And I am going after him!"

I was pretty well worked up, though I did not act so very excited. But Vivian knew me well enough to know how I felt. She sat up and put out her hands toward me, saying—

"Don, will you promise me something?"

"Yes. Anything that will not make life easier for von Hartmann and those like him, which means that I will not quit or go to Africa or some other place far away."

"No," she said enigmatically, shaking her head, too. "Nothing like that. Will you promise?"

"Yes."

"Then when you go after von Hartmann, take me with you!"

I was surprised; also not particularly pleased. But that was like Vivian: one minute to weep because she was tired of trouble and dangers and the next to trap me with a promise to get her into more.

I folded my arms around her and asked—

"But why?"

"I'm an American too!" she said fiercely.

VII

IT WAS only when George brought coffee and papers the next morning that I realized that I was nearly dead. As I have prematurely remarked, the papers gave some attention to my reported "almost death." No two accounts were alike, but that did not matter as none of them were true; and the papers were scarcely to blame for elaborating what my imagination had already devised. If the accounts were not true they were at least entertaining, and that is something to be desired by all writers; and if even Homer nodded, such as I may be expected not only to nod but to put others to sleep.

I at least could never have gone to sleep reading those papers. I enjoyed them immensely. I even wished that Mark Twain had not first said—providing I was sure that I would have thought of it, which is scarcely likely—in a situation similar to mine that the account of his death had been greatly exaggerated. True, no paper said I was dead; but all were agreed, and that was the sole point on which any of them coincided, that I could not live.

But playing the invalid in this case had a few drawbacks. In the first place I did not care to be seen. I not only wished Gaboreau to believe me dead—and if he should have seen a paper he would perhaps have marveled greatly in seeing that I lived—but I wished von Hartmann to lull himself into a feeling of security. So I could not afford to be seen by any one who would be likely to carry the news of my prompt recovery to von Hartmann, or elsewhere.

Next, there were more telephone calls than a man with as many ears as there are eyes on a potato could have answered. So many people seemed interested in my welfare that I strongly suspected von Hartmann, or some one for him, was calling up every ten minutes in the hope of hearing what would to him be good news. George solved that problem by plugging up the 'phone. Next I discovered from the papers and with a good deal of apprehension that the coroner would hold an inquest on the premises, which is the newspaper's way of saying that he would investigate.

There seemed to be no question that the two men had come by their deaths deservedly, and Yang figured prominently.

Of course Dr. Roberts would have to say that I was "too weak" to be questioned. I wondered when his gruff honest soul would be stretched to the snapping-point and he would refuse further to compromise himself with the truth; but I really had no fear that he would balk after going so far.

And he did not. He acted nobly—at least in keeping with my idea of nobility. I ask none to accept my code of ethics, and I do not want any one to try forcing theirs upon me. I do what I think is right, and I think it wrong to harm any one who does not deserve it. That sums up my ethical code precisely. I suppose Gaboreau and even von Hartmann could have defined theirs in the same words. But I could go further than they. I might at times be a bit of a law-breaker, but

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I usually do it for the best interests of those who abide by the laws.

I know it is better to fight the devil with holy water than with fire; but for my part I would rather see the devil nursing a blistered tail than hear him chant "Te Deum." I would know that he really felt the burns, but be suspicious that he simulated the other feeling. And I will not feel troubled by those who censure my deceptions until they quit greeting persons whom they detest with politeness, quit laughing loudly at the stupid jokes of rich men, and quit being honest simply because they are afraid their employers will miss the rifled cash.

But to quit my sermonizing and get along with the tale. The coroner insisted on seeing me, so with a great bandage on my head and in a darkened room, I lay as nearly after the manner of one near to death as is possible when that one is on the verge of exploding with laughter. I did not dare open my eyes, and my breath came jerky in the painful effort not to snort.

"Breathing hard, poor fellow," said the coroner sympathetically to Dr. Roberts who stood by.

When they were gone I got up and played solitaire with the idea of amusing myself until Mr. Gerald Eddy—who, he later confided with me, had been called Gerald Allan Eddy by devoted parents who hoped that he might turn out to be a poet, a preacher, or something befitting the name—had finished his slumbers and been fortified by a breakfast.

But before Eddy was ready I hastily returned to my bed, bandages and all, and assuming my death-bed manner, awaited the entrance of Mr. Henshaw, who had called in person and begged to be permitted to speak just three words to me in private. It developed, however, that he could not get all he wanted to say into three words.

He was neatly dressed, looking sartorially elegant, but his face belied his clothes. He had much on his mind that showed in his features. He was worried. There were depths to that fellow, not the vast ones of a big brain, but the murky deceptive ones—like quicksand under muddy water. Being an international spy must bring out cunning until it coats one's thoughts like the gilt at the back of a mirror.

"I tried to warn you," he said, with as near regret in his voice as he could simulate.

I said nothing. I was supposed to be dying. Besides, his "warning" had been that I stay indoors!

"I telephoned—again and again."

My eyelids flickered in grateful acknowledgment.

"When H was sure that he knew where the money was, he told the Butcher to get you and I wanted you to be on guard." A pause. "You can't recover."

He said it in that peculiar tone which may pass almost equally as a statement or a question. I barely shook my head and sighed wearily, narrowed my eyes until they seemed closed—but one can peer between the lids when they are imperceptibly opened.

I did not especially like the expression on his face. In fact I never like the expression on the face of an amateur gambler when he holds four aces. The evil beast in a man usually comes to the surface when he is making a fool of a woman—or trying to—and when he is trying to cajole a dupe into bucking a "sure thing" hand. I did not know what was up his sleeve, but I could tell that Mr. Henshaw had a sure thing—or thought he had.

"When you die, what's to become of me?" he said as coldly as though asking a creditor for payment.

I opened my eyes in a sign of inquiry, and closed them again, or appeared to, when he started talking.

"You promised to protect me. You made Condon and Gregory believe I had sold H out. When you die they will get even with me. I've been square with you. I tried to warn you last night."

My rôle was a silent one.

"H is in a bad humor. He tried to put something over on Gaboreau last night and somebody carried off the bacon right from under his nose. He's missed Gregory and Condon. Especially Gregory. He thinks you've killed them."

Evidently that was what Henshaw had led von Hartmann to think, and was probably one of the reasons why von Hartmann had been so anxious to make short work of me.

I wondered very much what sort of message Henshaw really tried to deliver over the 'phone the night before. Probably he would have tried to tell me that I had nothing to fear. Or it may have been

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that having really tried to warn me, and failed, he was now trying to trim his sails to catch the breeze that had veered suddenly. I continued to listen.

"You are done for, Everhard. You've played a strong game, but now you have to cash in. And I have to look out for myself. I want you to turn Condon and Gregory over to me."

Again I indicated a wish to know why by opening my eyes. I appeared to be very weak. I am not sure, but perhaps I groaned a bit.

"DO YOU really want to know?" he asked with something akin to sinister glee. "Well, I want you to know, too. You think you have made a fool of me all the way through. But you haven't. You are a dead one. You might as well be. I've given you the double-cross right straight through. I told H that you had trapped all three of us that night, and offered each of us a wad of coin to turn on him, that Gregory and Condon agreed, and that I pretended to, but took the first opportunity to get away.

"I really didn't come here to tell you that, but you might as well know it. I would hate to have you go to hell believing that you had put something over on me! Now I want Gregory and Condon. See? I didn't expect you would want to give them up, so I came prepared. Here is an order I have written out, 'Let Henshaw take Condon and Gregory,' and I expect you to sign it. That'll let me get them out of the house. You're strong enough to scrawl your name, and, by God, if you don't, I'll smother you!"

His face was fierce, and like most fools he did not seem to realize that a man such as I, when near death, would not be frightened by having death hastened an hour or two. He was trying to intimidate a dying man.

I very quietly, unhurriedly, pushed back the bed covers, then pulled off my bandage, and sitting up on the edge of the bed, looked at the stupefied Henshaw. He had been too astonished to move or even cry out. Lazarus breaking from the tomb was not more unexpected than I rising from my mattress.

"Good God! You devil!" he managed to say in an awed, terrified voice after I had looked at him for some seconds.

And when I look at a man as I looked at Henshaw it means that he is in trouble; and he seldom fails to realize it.

There was method and plenty of it in my action. I knew in a flash that if he had come—crazy plan, as it was—with an order written out for me to sign, he had not failed to make arrangements for meeting von Hartmann for the purpose of outfacing the two victims when they should accuse him of being a traitor. The very fact that he brought them before von Hartmann would seem to be convincing evidence that there was no truth in their charges.

Henshaw had cunning, lots of it; but no sense.

"Speaking of being smothered," I said, dropping my words in a measured tone, "reminded me that I have an air-tight cistern-like hole out there under the garage where I drop people that give me the double-cross. You'll find quite a few bones there awaiting yours. It is useless to make a fuss. It is not often that I have men come and confess, as you have done; so as a mark of consideration for your frankness I will bore a few holes in the top and let you have a pitcher and a loaf of bread so you can live longer. You won't smother. You will starve."

The man turned white as my own bandages and his knees bent and shook.

Of course I had no such place as that. I wouldn't have starved a fly. I can not bear the idea of physical torture. But he did not know.

"Let me live! Let me live!" the wretched fellow cried. "I will tell you everything. You can catch H! I will do anything. Only give me one more chance—just one. I will do anything!"

"No," I said firmly. "You have fooled me too many times."

"But I won't this time! I will tell you everything—where von Hartmann can be found—and all of them. Give me one more chance. Just one!"

"No."

"But I will tell you everything. I can help——"

"No. You would trick me again."

"On my honor——"

"On what?" I asked sharply.

"On my word! Before God—" and he raised his hands and face toward heaven—"I will tell you the truth. I will do what you want."

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"Well, listen. I don't believe you. I won't really give you a chance, either. But I never break a promise—not even to a rat like you. And now remember, I am not asking you to tell me anything. I am not making any bargain with you. But you can tell me whatever you want to, and if I find that it is of value—why, then I may let you live. But it has to prove of value, and I am to be the judge. Otherwise, into the cistern you go with your pitcher of water and loaf of bread. If you want to talk on those terms, go ahead. If you want to keep still, all right."

He talked. He burst forth in a torrent. He told me much. He mixed the trivial with the important. He seemed to think that the greater his number of words the more chances he would have. I can't set down what he said for I do not remember a third of it, and besides he talked and talked.

He told me that he was really terrified at the idea of offending von Hartmann because that man would stop at nothing—which may or may not have been true. That after he left me the last time he had hit on the scheme of saving his own hide by making out that Condon and Gregory had turned on von Hartmann; and that von Hartmann was so pleased by his loyalty and information that he at once took him into his confidence.

He told me of the raid on Gaboreau's house, and the plans for murdering the old fellow; of how the paper-hanger had tipped off the hiding-place of the gold; and of how Gaboreau—he thought Gaboreau had done it, and seemed to think I could know nothing of that evening's work because I was supposed to have been at home where I was shot—had driven off with the van; how the neighborhood had been scoured for the van, and the driver when found had given a false address as the point of delivery, and when followed and located after he had turned in the van he swore that the boxes had been dumped on a vacant lot, and that evidence was actually found of the boxes having been thrown there. He told me all that, which was far from being news.

He did tell me much else, where von Hartmann lived and the sort of life he lived and manner of man he was. Von Hartmann had a big stone house that was converted into a sort of a fortress. There were many—a great many—trusted Germans in it who never left it. None of the agents, excepting one or two of the highest, knew von Hartmann's address; few knew his name. But thanks to the false story told about Condon and Gregory, von Hartmann had suddenly elevated Henshaw to his confidence.

And Henshaw told me some remarkable things.. There was a wireless cunningly concealed on the roof; there was a cellar stocked with choice wines. The doors on the ground floor were of the heaviest wood, cross-braced with ornamental iron bars and lined inside with asbestos. The windows on the ground and second floors had steel shutters that closed from the inside, making the house almost assault-proof, at least for thirty minutes or so.

The house was full of German reservists, with men who had profited by the Delbruck law so that they took the oath of allegiance of America while secretly retaining their German citizenship, and had kept in touch with the Wilhelmstrasse. Von Hartmann was secreting them until he could devise ways and means of smuggling them out and into Mexico where they were to join with and train the desperadoes south of the Rio Grande for raids on the border line.

In the tower of "The Castle" were stored great quantities of explosive. This had been placed in the tower because von Hartmann intended to fire the house if the police ever attempted a raid and he wanted it to be out of reach of the flames until he and his men had had plenty of time to escape. Henshaw did not know just how they planned to escape, but fancied it was through a subterranean passage.

A windlass and cable operating from the tower on the south side of the house permitted explosives to be lowered away and carried off unseen even if the police, rendered suspicious, should begin keeping a watch on the doors to see what went in and came out. Oh yes, von Hartmann had planned everything out with that precise forethought that characterized the German preparation for war.

He had kept his funds stored in another place, because, if he should be compelled to abandon The Castle—which, however, was in his mind highly improbable—his money would still be available with which to begin operations over again at once.

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A very complicated and systematic arrangement indeed; but war work according to the German plan.

Von Hartmann himself was a lecherous old bull who frequently brought in pretty women for a night's fun, saying that because he worked hard he must play hard; but of course they never suspected that he was other than a retired old stock-broker having a fling.

IN PERSON von Hartmann was big and dark, not at all the common type of German. He was crafty. He used disguises, too. He had himself entered Gaboreau's house hoping to wring the old man's neck in his own powerful hands. He had been terribly surprised by the wrecked room and monstrous snake. That was inexplicable. It was not possible to get into his own house unless admitted in person by von Hartmann, who rarely went out except to meet some agent by appointment. He drank a great deal, but it was only as another might drink water.

He lived in a large stone house, an "edifice" in the suburbs, with grounds that covered half a block, originally built—so I discovered later—by a parvenu with a wife socially ambitious, who, having a daughter with whom she hoped to capture a title, had required her husband to build a "castle" that the nobility whom she lured to her hospitality might feel more at home. At least, that was the cynical information given by a friend of mine who was well versed in the social register.

The parvenu *et al.* eventually retired to the small town from which they came to storm the city, and perhaps preferred to be the big fish in the proverbially small pond to being a minnow in New York.

Henshaw emphasized the masterly way in which von Hartmann guarded against intrusion. Not even tradesmen were allowed to enter. The chief of spies had proudly explained all that to his newly 'breveted captain, and boasted that the "stupid Yankees" never made arrests until they had the evidence, and as long as he could keep them out they could not have the evidence! And when they did get in the evidence would be destroyed and the house empty! He had said that with an eloquent gesture toward a large cabinet which no doubt contained indispensable secrets.

But my experience has been that all men have the vulnerable spot. Even the greatest hero of Homer found death from the arrow that struck his heel; and before Henshaw had finished his long monologue I had worked out a little scheme that seemed to be exactly what was needed.

That does not necessarily imply that I am quick-brained, but Henshaw talked so long that I had plenty of time to think while I listened only enough to make sure that I was missing nothing of importance. He was talking for his life, or thought that he was; and while he was not particularly eloquent, he made it up in loquacity.

"All right," I said, when he showed symptoms of being near the end. "I will investigate and see how much of what you have told is truth."

"It is all truth. Every word of it!"

"No doubt."

I had Eddy called. Before he came in I slipped into a dressing-gown, tossed the bandages out of sight, and had Henshaw sit down across the room. Eddy had not seen any papers. He did not know I was supposed to have been shot, and I did not want to arouse his curiosity.

When he came in, grinning affably, I indicated Henshaw and said—

"Do you happen to know Mr. Henshaw?"

Eddy looked him over, and poking a thumb under an armhole of his vest wiggled his fingers vigorously as he replied:

"Know that guy? You bet. How'd you catch 'im?"

"Mr. Henshaw has come into our camp."

"Has, huh?"

"Yes. He says that H, otherwise von Hartmann, lives in The Castle. How does that meet with your evidence?"

"He's a mile an' sixteen feet off. An' you know it, don'tchu, old top? Von Hartmann's hanging out in a little apartment house that I could name, but won't. See, bo?"

"No," Henshaw said hastily, "he doesn't live at the Kingston."

"The —— he don't. You do. That Musset dame does. Condon does. Gregory does. We've known all that fer a long time. Now I found von Hartmann there, wit' that Big Turk. I've seen von Squeezics goin' an' comin'—the back way."

"Not von Hartmann."

"Who in the——, then?"

"That's another fellow. Calls himself

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Campbell. He's one of us—of them, I mean."

"Mean t' tell me I been shadowin' the wrong guy?"

"I don't know anything about you, but I know Campbell looks something like von Hartmann, and he has a room at the Kingston and used the tradespeople's entrance. By the way," Henshaw added, "the Kingston is German owned. That is why von Hartmann has installed so many of his staff there—that is, of the skilled agents."

"Say, 're you tryin' to string me?" Eddy demanded.

"No. I'm telling you the truth, all of it."

"Then somethin' happened to you—tellin' the truth. An' if that guy Campbell lives at the Kingston, why does he sneak out and meet you guys at some corner or other when he could just walk up or down stairs—providin' he got suspicious o' me 'cause I was runnin' the elevator a few hours while the regular pilot went to bury his grandmother?"

"Von Hartmann sometimes puts on a hat and coat like Campbell's and imitates that flat-foot walk of his. Von Hartmann really thinks that he is an artist at disguise."

"Well, I'll be ——," Eddy said, looking at me. "An' I heard that bunch yesterday say it was all over with Everhard. They was mumblin' the funeral service. You was due to go to bed wit' a spade, Mr. Everhard. The Turk said he'd cut you up so nothin' bigger 'an fish-bait 'd be left." Then quickly he added: "A good thing the Old Man wouldn't see me last night. Say, if I'd given him a bum steer like that, he'd 'a' shipped me out to play poker wit' farmers, and 'a' told me not to bet unless I dealt myself.

"But I believe this guy's flyin' a kite. Say, old Tinhorn, d'you know what happens to little boys as tells lies? They go to the bad place—sometimes —— pronto. Get me, bo?"

Henshaw got him all right, thinking that Eddy knew of the cistern and referred to it.

I was inclined to think that Eddy was not so astute as he had believed; and that there was precious little about the Kingston that he would have been able to tell Gaboreau, for Gaboreau had more sources of information than any one could conceive of. However, he made a practise of setting a number of men at work digging up facts independent of each other; and each brought to him what had been learned; then he weighed and compared and deduced.

But I was certainly glad that Eddy had thought his information had been of enough importance on the night before to wait around for a chance to whisper it to Gaboreau; and no doubt the fact that he had overheard the plans to murder me encouraged him to believe that I was really working with Gaboreau.

"Supposing," I said to Eddy, "that I have reason for believing that von Hartmann is to be located at The Castle, and that we are to have some trouble to get in, and possibly more trouble to get out, will you volunteer for the expedition?"

"Volunteer? Nay bo. I'll fight for it. Try to leave me out an' I'll call the police an' say I been robbed. That's what us girls always do when the rent's due an'——"

Eddy put on a mincing air by way of impersonating the cunning female who would devise such a scheme to get further credit from the landlady.

"Henshaw, do you shoot craps?" I asked.

He looked blank, but nodded slightly, indicating that he was not wholly unfamiliar with the game.

"And I suppose you have been well paid lately?"

Again the dubious nod.

"And you have the money on you?"

He looked at me as though suspecting some sort of wizardry, and said faintly—

"Yes."

"Very well. I'll leave you here to entertain Mr. Eddy in a little game of craps. And Eddy, take your time. Keep Mr. Henshaw entertained until I come back, will you?"

Eddy had much the same expression of eagerness, gratitude and surprise as a colored gentleman might have when invited to sit down to stewed chicken and watermelon. His hand came from his pocket and two little white-spotted cubes rattled together.

I went out.

GABOREAU had been given a room adjoining that of Miss Latour, and I had said that he might pass from one to the other at will. I could tell by the fact that Yang was in front of

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her door that Gaboreau was with his niece. I hurried by and into Vivian's room.

"My dear," I said, "do you know the difference between Viennese and Berliner Deutsch?"

"And you are supposed to be dying, too. Don, what are you smiling like that about?"

"Listen. How would you like to be an Austrian lady, very much without friends, and needing help? Supposing you were told that an estimable old stock-broker living in a stone mansion would be likely to have his heart touched by the distress of a pretty Austrian? Wouldn't you naturally allow him to aid and entertain you? Certainly, if you were given a letter of introduction. Perhaps you would be accompanied by your maid."

"What on earth are you talking of?"

"Von Hartmann has never seen you. Few if any of his people have. Yes, from what I have heard of him, I think he would be glad to give aid to you."

"Don!"

"My dear, you have heard of entertaining angels unaware. Well, I have hopes that von Hartmann may entertain one whom he would prefer less than the devil—unaware. He is a hard-drinking old goat, and loves pretty women. It is said that all women look alike in the dark. Certainly any one might pass for you with a long cloak, a heavy veil and a drooping hat.

"No. I am not trying to explain anything. I am only thinking. I have heard on what I believe is good authority that no strangers other than pretty women are admitted into von Hartmann's home. And I am one of those men that have always had contempt for other men who get women to do risky work for them. But circumstances alter cases."

She could not tell how serious I was. As a matter of fact I was serious, but not in the way that one might think from the words. I was serious, but full of chuckles at the joke I was hoping to play on von Hartmann. It is said that he laughs best who laughs last, but I wish to laugh both times.

I explained to Vivian in detail what I had in mind. To my surprise she refused—at first—declaring, after numerous questions, that it was too dangerous and—she left me to infer what she meant by the "and—" and I inferred that it was one of those woman's reasons, which like "because," has no body or being; but is simply a woman's way of saying she doesn't want to do a thing.

But I knew very well that Vivian would. I elaborated on the surprise that would come to von Hartmann, and she laughed at that. Then I said that if she would not play the part, I would appeal to some one of my friends for the address of a clever, pretty, daring woman who would.

That threat nearly cost me what hair I have on my head. Vivian is pretty, clever, daring—and jealous.

If I just dared get any other woman—well, a number of things would happen, including the loss of the eyes of the other woman, which would be scratched out.

As a result, she did what I expected she would, and agreed to go through with the little drama, farce, tragedy, burlesque—what you will—that I was preparing. But even after she agreed she begged me not to do it. She argued from every conceivable standpoint, even suggesting that "something" might happen to her—knowing that was the only argument that would possibly have any appeal to me, for I did not care at all for the dangers which she suggested might come from the police, from the Federal authorities, from von Hartmann himself and his crew. My mind was made up.

But there is many a slip between planning a drama and getting it produced. I went back to the room where I had left Eddy and Henshaw, intending to dispose of them for the time and draft a rough copy of a letter that some one would have to sign.

I went into the room—and it was empty.

Henshaw had slipped through my fingers. I made inquiry. He and Eddy had left, and by the front door a good twenty minutes before. Henshaw had come in of his own will, and George, who saw him leaving, did not know that I wished him detained. No one but Rob—who was with Miss Latour and her uncle—knew that I wanted Eddy kept in the house.

What had happened was this: I had frightened Henshaw so badly that he was desperate to get away. That was evident. But I guessed that he and Eddy, in talking at random perhaps, had hit on a subject toward which each could supply a bit of information that would make it entirely

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plain to the other. Henshaw knew what those boxes contained. Eddy knew where they were—or about where. They had likely enough come to an understanding and flown. The loot was enough to tempt any man.

I was not afraid, however, that Henshaw would let von Hartmann know how much had been confessed to me. No. He might tell von Hartmann that I was enjoying good health, but he would certainly not tell him that he, Henshaw, had been frightened into babbling about The Castle. He might warn him to be more careful than ever, but it would be suicidal to even intimate that he, the new captain, had blabbed.

But their escape made complications indeed.

I sat down on the edge of the bed to think; and as I thought I bit the end of a pencil, and I bit so hard that the lead came off and was crunched between my teeth. I spit it out and reached for the carafe to pour a glass of water to rinse my mouth. The water tasted queer. I wondered if water and lead of pencils made that acrid flavor; and spat out both. I tasted the water again. There was something the matter. It had been good water a few hours before, for I had drank from it.

I laid the pencil aside and continued to sit and think. Dr. Roberts had been using the telephone when I had made inquiries about Henshaw and Eddy's departure. I had him come up. He examined the water.

"Somebody," he said looking at me with the eyes of one who has seen another saved by a miracle, "did not expect you to taste this, or to rinse your mouth. One swallow and you would have been dead: it has enough strychnine to kill a regiment. If you had started to drink you couldn't have saved yourself in time. A mouthful would have gone down before you tasted it, bitter as it is."

"All right," I said, jumping at a solution to all of my troubles. "Announce that I am dead. Get your patriotic undertaker to dispose of my remains. Vivian must remain in close retirement, but Bessie can pose, under a heavy veil, as the widow. Mr. Henshaw thought that he was killing me off—and he really has aided me splendidly.

"Now he will believe that I am dead, and as it is immaterial to von Hartmann whether a bullet or poison did it, Henshaw will probably not relate that he found me well and healthy, but only say that he helped me into the coffin. Perhaps that is what he intended to do when he came. It may be why he came."

HERE again I can not set down things exactly as they happened, but will proceed to have my "funeral" over with in very few words. It was not until Mr. Crawley, the undertaker, had had a long talk with me that he would—I almost wrote "undertake": after all it is the word to use, and I will—undertake to dispose of the dummy in fitting obsequies. He did. The funeral, it seems needless to remark. was private, exceedingly so; and passed off without a hitch. The only real error in the entire arrangement was that I did not attend.

Bessie reluctantly took the part of the widow. She was veiled heavily and wept copiously, although she afterward admitted that most of the tears were due to laughter which she strangled into sob-like sounds; for it must have been quite amusing to listen to a worthy minister, who knew me only by the newspaper reports and the words of my friends, extolling my virtues. He had not only volunteered for the office, but rather insisted upon being allowed to speak, declaring that he was broad-minded enough to like a man who had made so much trouble for evil persons.

The situation was an extremely delicate one for the doctor and the undertaker; for, I believe, the penalties attached to falsifying a death certificate may be severe, though as I pointed out to each of them, I carried no life insurance, there were no legacies to fall to any one by my death, and there would probably be no one to prosecute even if the truth did come out—which I did not intend that it should until my own good time.

The funeral over, I remained in retirement for ten days. I wished to have everybody interested in my death thoroughly convinced and off guard.

But Gaboreau believed that I was dead; and von Hartmann too; also Henshaw. He may have wondered why I faked the wounds, but he was convinced that strychnine had done the work.

I learned in a very amazing way that Gaboreau was convinced. He was kept under guard, Yang ever before his door.

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George talked with him and intimated that he might be tried for my murder; but from what I could judge by the report George brought me, the terrible old fellow, whose brain was like quicksilver, was not worried in the least though he may have been convinced.

The result was that on the morning of my funeral, Gaboreau's room was empty. With sheets and blankets that man had made a rope and slipped to the ground. He was not strong in his arms. I marveled that his feeble hands had not broken their grip and let him drop. On the ground he had crawled—no one could tell how far, for though the track of his body was laid across the cold lawn strewn with manure, after he reached the sidewalk it was not possible to follow it for more than half a block.

I honestly felt sorry for him. Such daring, such strength of will to force that feeble, wrecked body, to carry him away. I felt sorry for him even before I was amazed by the sight of a note which he left addressed to Vivian. It was cruel and generous, brilliant and blunt; a strange message:

I would probably have killed your husband if he had lived. But I will turn this city on end to punish those who did kill him, not only because I hate them, but largely because I admired him. Madam, I admire but few men. Only Germans and other savages hate brave men that fight against them. I understand that you think mine was the hand that struck him down. It was not so. I would neither be ashamed nor fearful of telling the truth if it were otherwise: for what is a man's life that either the law or his friends should hold it such an enormity to deprive him of it?

This world over, scores die of natural causes, so called, every minute. A wreck and hundreds are snuffed out. The only inevitable thing of life is death. To kill is a great crime only because restitution of what is taken away can not be made. To me it is not a great crime.

When a pawn is in my way I sweep it from the board, though I may admire the workmanship with which the artist has wrought the chess set. And though I have often been angry with your husband and struck at him, yet I have never felt bitterness toward him, which is unusual for he has sometimes been something of a fool. But permit me to assure you, madam, that if you are ever in trouble or need those who would protect you—you see that I do not scandalize you by an offer of friendship—call upon G. through the personal column of any of our newspapers.

The ægis of Minerva bore the head of Medusa on the side exposed to foes, and it struck them dead; which all the more effectively shielded those over whom the buckler was thrown. If you do not see the analogy between the ægis and my protection, further words would be useless. I have the honor to be madam, your servant, GABOREAU.

A lunatic—yes, but such a one as may not be found again in a world-wide search. Even Vivian, as she shuddered, was touched.

I suppose that Gaboreau crawled through the street until he found a machine that picked him up; probably he told some story of an accident having left him helpless on the pavement, and was taken to some of his friends who quickly removed him to another hidden home. Certainly he succeeded in getting away and getting to friends; for the following day an ambulance, bringing a note from him to Vivian, requested permission to remove Jeanne Latour. She was taken away to a private hospital. Rob went with her.

Oddly enough Gaboreau seemed to have forgotten Jacques. He was never mentioned. I suppose because he had failed in doing what was expected of him his name was wiped from Gaboreau's memory. Anyway I kept him, chiefly, because I did not want him to carry away an account of the other two men held as prisoners.

It is likely that those people who unhesitatingly believe stories about girls being stolen and held by procurers, "white slavers" and such, will look askance at the fact of my holding three men as prisoners as long as I wished. All of which indicates that those people know very little of what not only can go on in the city, but of what does go on.

Jacques, I was holding until such a time as it seemed safe to have him talk as much as his tongue wished. Condon and Gregory I intended to use.

And during those days of enforced seclusion, which however were far from inactive, my entire effort and attention were directed toward arriving at the best means of ending the usefulness to the Kaiser of von Hartmann and his gang. Perhaps only those who know me well can understand why I presumed to play a lone hand against them when police and Secret Service would have gladly helped—when it was even dangerous to undertake the work without their aid and approval, for if I bungled I might bring their wrath down on my head.

Moreover, I not only did not want the credit, but I did not want to be identified with the *coup*. I hoped to make von Hartmann very much regret the day he came to America. Perhaps some people will think my ideas diabolical; but I had to do

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with a German terrorist, a dynamiter, an assassin, and his gang of mongrel cutthroats. Only one of all those I had encountered, the dull-faced Smith, was a German. Henshaw, Gregory, Condon, Miss Musset, were of mixed blood, international "agents," hired out to Germany.

I really did not care so much how many of the latter escaped my trap—that is, I would be satisfied if they ran into the arms of the Federal authorities. But von Hartmann was in for something more. I told no one, not even Vivian, precisely what I had in mind; for she, with all the stubbornness of which she was capable would have opposed it—not because I was being "diabolical," but because I was being foolhardy.

But before I proceed to describe the way in which I went after von Hartmann and succeeded in using my wife as a bait—but I would suggest that those who flush indignantly at the idea of such a thing suspend judgment until the whole story is told—I perhaps would do well to tell something of what was happening in my own back yard.

THE times in my life that I have been beaten, baffled, flabbergasted and dumfounded are few. I rather pride myself on being able to outguess other people; but added to this propensity for guessing is a faculty of watchfulness. Any one may be sure that I did not omit to keep a close watch on the back yard.

A million dollars—not counting that there were almost enough boxes to contain a million and a half—seemed such an astounding sum that I had moments of tremor lest I should awaken and find I had been enjoying an "Arabian Nights" dream. But, seriously, I had no doubts, and I did not investigate because I knew the house was being closely watched.

The watchers were openly intent as well as secretly so. Strangers came on one pretext and another and tried to get in. Henshaw and Eddy put in an appearance almost daily, too.

At first I thought that the two rascals had gone into collusion to get away with the loot for themselves; and that Henshaw had not told von Hartmann nor had Eddy told Gaboreau of the suspicions they had. I came to this conclusion rather obliquely. That is, I knew something of Gaboreau's desperate character and also of von Hartmann's. Either would, it seemed to me, have resorted to ingenious violence to search the house, and though we were continually on the watch, nothing either ingenious or violent was attempted.

True, Henshaw tried a number of things. But Eddy seemed to act in a peculiar manner. He was light-hearted and flippant, and frequently when unobserved I caught him looking at Henshaw in a queer way.

I could have got my hands on Henshaw any number of times, but I did not want him. In my scheme of things it was entirely suitable to have him at liberty as long as he continued intimate at The Castle, and the watch I kept on that place—for another purpose however than being familiar with his movements—showed that he was.

One of the first things that he did was to demand to see my wife—whom he had never met. Bessie was called and listened to a long story of how dear a friend of mine he had been, and did she know of some boxes which I had disposed of for him!

She did not, answering quite truthfully by saying that I never confided my affairs with her.

Might he search the house?

No, he might not; for if they were in the house she would surely have known of it as every nook and corner had quite recently been gone over; and she did not care to have him wasting his time.

As a result he was suspicious that she not only knew of the money but had appropriated it.

He threatened to call the police, and Bessie called George.

It happens, as I have already tried to show, that George's head was not nearly so dull as his face. It happened also that Henshaw had repeatedly demanded that Condon and Gregory be "released," which was his way of asking that they be given into his keeping. George suggested that both Condon and Gregory would readily swear before any number of policemen that they had been remaining in the house of their own free will as they—Gregory, anyway—were loyal enough to von Hartmann to swear to anything that would not lead to an exhaustive investigation by the police.

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George further intimated that he would probably arrange for their liberty anyway and allow them to get in touch with von Hartmann—which might be embarrassing for Mr. Henshaw.

Henshaw pretended that that was exactly what he wished, and that it was von Hartmann to whom he wanted to take them. But I had my doubts—lots of them. I did not believe it possible that he could outface the story that they could tell von Hartmann. He might; but it would be ever so much more comfortable for him to put those two witnesses out of the way and keep still about it, or else to report to von Hartmann that "justice" to traitors had been done.

As I have said, I suspected that Eddy and Henshaw were out to cabbage the Kaiser's fund for themselves; and I am prone to have confidence in my suspicions. But there was something in Eddy's manner that puzzled me. The dapper little crook had none of Henshaw's taciturn anxiety. He jollied Jerry, joked with George, appeared to think Rob was a fine fellow, and often stood perkily watching Henshaw's face as the latter would sit brooding, thinking. They made no secret of the fact that they were looking for boxes that contained "valuable" papers. They thought themselves secure in the pose of having been my "friends."

Henshaw especially felt secure in that Jerry and George had heard me say that he was helping me, and he explained to them that since he could no longer be of service to me he had been straight with von Hartmann. He also said, and that remark gave me much reflection, that he knew now that I had never been allied with Gaboreau.

That remark set me thinking. There seemed only one way that he could have learned that. Eddy must have told him; and before Eddy could know Gaboreau must have told him. But if Eddy had got in touch with Gaboreau, why was not the old tiger himself after that money which he had so cunningly protected?

I found out in a most unique way. About ten or twelve days after my "funeral" there came a heavy, cold rain. Eddy discovered a box that the rain had uncovered. Instead of doing what I naturally suspected he would, and cover it again waiting for a chance to carry off the boxes himself, he called Henshaw and showed them to him. They even scraped away the manure with their hands; and reported to George that the boxes had been found and that they would call a truck and have them carried away—Henshaw pretending that they were really his.

George told him that nothing of the kind would be done.

That night they attempted to steal the boxes. Rob fired from the window, and the rascals fled.

They returned the next morning accompanied by a man in police uniform who talked blusteringly.

George with one swift blow, complaisantly delivered, knocked the man and uniform down the front stairs.

"He wore number seven shoes—and them patent leather," George offered by way of explanation when I asked why this rudeness to a guardian of the law.

George undoubtedly saw other things too that indicated the imposter, but that sentence summed it up, although he added that he could not endure the sight of a man who wore patent leathers.

"All policemen have big feet," as the old song goes.

Henshaw went into a rage, threatened and promised dire things. Eddy laughed, applauding George:

"What a rib-rattler! Old pious bones the champ.-belt's adorned the waist o' pugs for less of a kick 'an that." And he guyed the "policeman" in a fashion that indicated a familiarity and lack of respect which Eddy, out of discretion at least, would never have turned on to a "real harness bull."

I was busy with other matters which were just about at a climax, but seeing that the hiding-place had been discovered, arrangements were under way to have the boxes distributed in various deposit vaults. But since the war it is not easy to get banks to house sealed packages; and to reveal the contents would have been scarcely less embarrassing for me if they had been dynamite instead of gold and currency. So it was not so simple to dispose of that wealth as might appear.

HOWEVER, a solution came in a most unexpected way; and any one may judge my feelings the following morning when Eddy, cocky as a bantam, came with a package for Mrs. Everhard

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and flopped himself into a chair to await the answer.

Bessie brought the package to Vivian who brought it to me.

The first thing that I saw was a small bundle of receipts. There were acknowledgments from the Soldiers' Tobacco Fund, the Red Cross, the Belgian Relief and French Relief, the Red Star, Armenian and Polish Reliefs, from the societies for the aid of blinded soldiers in all the Allied countries, from the Library Association supplying camps and ships with books, from the Navy League.

There was probably not a patriotic organization of any importance that had not received a substantial donation. They had all written to express thanks and to say that the wishes of the donor would be respected and his name withheld; and all were made out to Jeanne Latour.

The receipts, clipped together, had been so arranged that it was necessary to go pretty well through them before coming upon the note inserted.

It was from Gaboreau and addressed to Vivian:

MADAM:

Your husband was accustomed to meddle in my affairs, but you are a woman of judgment. How those boxes which I had planted for a party whose name may or may not be known to you came to be in the hands of your husband, I can not imagine. He could not have been the one that stole them, van and all, for he was at home, as you remember, with tears; but some of the people who serve him are daring, as well as similar enough in appearance to deceive the eyes of the bearer of this note.

Eddy admits that he was not well acquainted with your husband, and also that it could not have been he, since this gentleman was well and agreeable on the following morning. You probably know more of this than I. And it would be strange if Everhard had not learned a lesson I once taught him about the advantages of having a double. It is only because I do not wish to insult you in your grief which I saw was such as no woman could simulate that I do not ask if perchance it was not the "double" whom the assassin reached.

But I am not writing this to probe your wounds or chronicle my—not suspicions, perhaps, but we will say "reflections." I perceive that the boxes are being well guarded. Let them go whither they will. The accompanying receipts and letters will show that more than a million dollars has been disbursed of late and by one who could not possibly have contributed so generously to workers amid the wreckage heaped up by the Boche if he had not levied upon the funds of the War Lord himself. The boxes now contain nothing but rags and rocks.

They were planted by a paper-hanger and carpenter in my home, who, according to instructions, talked for the benefit of ears that listened eagerly. I knew those ears would sooner or later bring their owners into my house. I would probably have cut off the ears for souvenirs and given the owners over to my carpenter and paper-hanger to wall up. But your husband interfered.

Needless to say, I was not pleased. I even undertook to make you a widow, but he made me your guest—and while there is life in this broken body of mine I shall never forget your kindness and attention to my niece.

But, madam, I am growing sentimental. Let the boxes go. I enclose these receipts to show you the money has been spent, and in a way that will meet with your approval. Kindly return them. Some day I shall forward them to the Kaiser with a note of explanation. Your husband would have approved of that.

And if your husband is in heaven, to where no doubt your great love and prayers have lifted him, he is leaning over the ramparts watching, and for once, approving of what I am doing; and if he is in hell where I shall certainly have the pleasure some time of renewing his acquaintance, he is cheerfully at work salting down with red coals the shades of Huns and will rejoice exceedingly to see the discomfiture of those who will discover rocks and rags where they expect coin of the realm.

GABOREAU.

P. S.—Perhaps this is as good a place as any to warn you that your young relative, whose name I understand is Rob Towne, will get into trouble if he persists in his attention toward my niece. She will marry him!

The letter had evidently been written in high spirit. I could well imagine how satisfied Gaboreau felt with having made von Hartmann work so hard for boxes that contained nothing but rags and rocks; and though I felt a little dizzy to think what chances I had taken to get them and what precautions to guard them, yet as I fingered the package of receipts I did not feel the disappointment that some people might think would have been natural.

The Kaiser's spy fund had gone into America's war work. Of course, it would have been much more satisfying to have put it there myself; but Gaboreau, a veteran of a previous war against Germany, had even more reasons than I for appreciating the humor and ironic justice of the contributions that he had made.

"What do you make of it?" Vivian asked.

"That Eddy was right."

"Eddy?"

"Yes, my dear. He told me that no one could put anything 'over' on the Old Man. I must be losing my grip."

"He hints that he knows you are alive."

"Yes. And that he is keeping an eye on von Hartmann. I wonder what he is up to? A queer situation, isn't it? A three-cornered fight—though he also hints

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at an alliance through Rob. The first sentence of that postscript made me turn cold. But the exclamation point at the end of the second warmed me up again."

"We can't let Rob marry her," Vivian said suddenly.

"Why not?"

"The niece of such a man."

"Such a man—indeed," I replied, tapping the receipts.

"Don, I believe you actually like him!"

"That has nothing to do with it. If Rob likes her——"

"But he is a criminal!" she wailed.

"And you are thinking of Rob's mother. Your uncle, my dear, was a fine old robber himself. A capitalist, I believe, and——"

"You are mean."

"Two things I never interfere with. I never tell a man how many cards he shall have on the second draw nor what woman he shall marry. Gaboreau is a criminal, a bad one. I have no love for him. But his niece never saw him until a few months ago. And as for Gaboreau—you have said there was something about the man you could not help but admire even while you wished him dead.

"But Eddy is waiting for his answer. Here—take these receipts and write a note saying the boxes can be removed tomorrow afternoon—late. Around seven o'clock. I shall make sure that the boxes are taken to The Castle, and that Henshaw, Gregory and Condon will go with them. All that fits nicely into my plans.

"A good general, I have been told, turns everything that comes up to his advantage. I may not be a good general, but I can try a little strategy. I am sure it will not interfere with my plans to have the boxes delivered along about eight or nine, and it may add to the gaiety of the situation. As for Rob—let him alone."

TO BE CONCLUDED

THE TRAMP

by BERTON BRALEY

THE battleship's a fighter and the cruiser is a scout,
While lean and swift destroyers that dart and dash about
Are speedy blooded horses of the ocean cavalry,
But the commissary wagon of the forces—that is me.
I snub along at fourteen knots upon the deep-sea road,
With beef and grain and shrapnel shells and motor trucks for load;
My lookout peers for submarines around the waters blue,
And if I just have luck enough I reckon I'll get through.

I used to be a peaceful boat and never packed a gun,
But that was in the easy days before the sneaking Hun
Sent out his gray-green murderers beneath the wave to lurk
And sink the liners and the tramps and call it "fighters' work,"
But now I'm heeled in proper style with guns both fore and aft
And crews that only ask the chance to smash those pirate craft,
The slimy, slinking submarines that never stand and fight
But stab at us in stealthy ways and flounder out of sight.

The battleship's a fighter and I'm a cargo-ship;
Yet maybe there will come a chance, perhaps this very trip,
When I can land a punch or two and put a sub to sleep
In Davy Jones' locker where the blind sea-serpents creep.
Meantime I do my fourteen knots where combers fall and rise—
An unromantic ocean-truck that's loaded with supplies.
I'm painted like a circus clown, a crazy sight to see,
But Yankee fighters couldn't fight except for boats like me!

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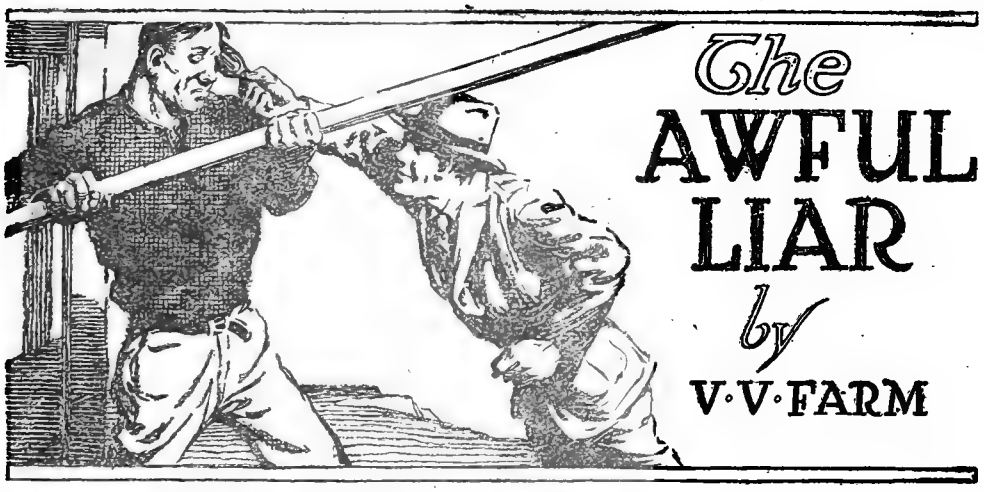

The AWFUL LIAR

by

V·V·FARM

SOPER, the bully from Hoppy's Landing, got drunk every holiday and came to Silver Hill Camp, looking for a fight. The day the governor-general was to pay a visit of inspection to the camp, Soper appeared on the scene at 11.05 A.M., and to save trouble was arrested at 11:06, and locked up at 11:07 by two men specially detailed for the job.

The bully, six-feet-three, and a second Sandow when drunk, was taken unawares, and he was quickly bolted and barred in a box-stall in Pettigrew's barn. Then the special constables perspiringly retreated to Hawkins' saloon for beer and talkee-talkee.

The governor-general and his party were scheduled to arrive about noon; consequently the town was thronged with visitors.

Hansalt, a mining engineer from the West, accepted a bid to share a bottle with the amateur police; and soon the circle was widened to include a half dozen others.

Into the sea of talk and foamy glasses came "Babe" Cadwallander, short, stocky, fair-haired and smiling. Immediately Bob Evarts stood up, took a pace forward, shaded his eyes with his hand, and demanded stentoriously—

"Where is Mr. Cadwallander?"

Those who understood the sally laughed immoderately. Hansalt's eyebrows were interrogative.

"Tell Hansalt the story, Babe," prompted Evarts, filling a glass for the newcomer.

"Nope, *bébé*," objected Wilton, "tell about the bull-fight. That's a bigger one."

"What's the matter with that India yarn, fellows?" queried Raeburn with mock anxiety. "Ain't we going to have that?"

"What is the India story? Tell it, please, Mr. Cad—Cad—" said Hansalt.

"Cadwallander, sir, late of his Majesty's navy, sir," supplied Babe, emptying his glass.

"No," said Degeer judiciously, as the glasses were filled again. "I like the bull-fight story best. Tell Hansalt that one, Baby-Face."

Nothing loath, the little fellow with the infantile countenance drained his glass.

"Don't come it too strong, now, Babe," interposed Jones, pleadingly.

"Righto!" said Cadwallander, with his usual smile. "When I was in Madrid, Mr. Hansalt——"

"Visiting the King and Queen of Spain," suggested Wilton.

"Please do not be foolish," commanded Babe, with a dignified wave of his hand. "As I said, I was in Madrid. I chanced to attend a bull-fight, and it happened that the bull was directly in front of my seat when he gored the matador. As I saw that the man's life was in danger I sprang into the arena, dispatched the bull with a knife, and——"

"Oh, by the way," interrupted Hansalt, pointedly ignoring the raconteur, and turning to Degeer, "that was an awfully good cigar you gave me the last time I saw you. Where do you get that brand?"

For the first time Babe's face fell. To be so markedly snubbed by a stranger had the effect of dampening even his volatile spirits. He got up and withdrew from the room.

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"Now, that's too bad," broke in Jones, deploringly. "Babe's stories are a popular institution around here, Hansalt, and you mustn't get peevish and be a spoil-sport. We enjoy hearing them and Babe enjoys telling them, so why worry? You missed a good one when you didn't hear his Chinese yarn. It's worth the price of admission alone.

"Babe's a good head, although he does suffer from elephantiasis of the imagination, and we wouldn't have his feelings hurt for worlds. Like any artist, he is sensitive. He doesn't mind our gibes, but he expects a stranger to be decently credulous and polite when he exercises his great gift."

"So sorry," said Hansalt, contritely. "Can't we get him back for another spasm?"

Just then the door opened and Babe put his head in.

"Special constables Jones and Degeer," he sang out, "I have the honor to report that your prisoner has escaped from the horse-stable, and has disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him up."

The two men arose, and with them Hansalt, who grasped Cadwallander by the arm before he could escape.

"I am very sorry I interrupted your remarks a few moments ago," he said. "Won't you please tell me that Chinese yarn of yours?" He rang for more beer.

"Thanks, but I'd rather not," answered Cadwallander.

"Well, if Babe won't, I will," chirped Evarts, with a disarming smile. "It was a sort of 'message to Garcia' business. Time of the Boxer trouble Admiral—Admiral—who was it, Babe?"

"Westerby," supplied Cadwallander.

"Called for a volunteer," continued Evarts, "to go ashore and carry dispatches to some high muck-a-muck in the interior."

"Sir Harvey de Mille," contributed Babe, in a mollified voice.

"He was so surprised to see such a small man step out of the ranks that he—he—what did he do, Babe?"

"He lent me his own gun to arm myself with," said Cadwallander, taking up the tale, "a very fine automatic."

"Not gold-plated, was it?" asked Raeburn, anxiously.

"Silver," said Babe, once more regaining his poise.

"And father-of-pearl handle?"

"Mother," corrected Babe, calmly, emptying his glass. "I had to proceed twenty miles inland, and on no account was I to let anybody see the documents I carried. Dressed like a Chinaman, my head shaved and a false pigtail down my back, I trusted to get through without any mishap, although my orders were to shoot any native who tried to stop me."

"Well, Mr. Hansalt, I'll not weary you with a lot of details but will content myself with a very brief statement of statistics. On my trip inland I killed thirty-one Boxers, and on the return journey forty-four; making seventy-five in all.

"The best part of the experience came after I reached the flag-ship. Admiral Westerby invited me into his cabin, and there over the cigars I related to him the incidents of the trip. The admiral was hugely pleased with my success, and at every fresh adventure that I recounted he would call to his man: 'Another bottle of beer for Mr. Cadwallander.'"

"'Mister' Cadwallander; get that, Bob?" said Raeburn to Evarts.

"I spent a very pleasant afternoon with Admiral Westerby," continued Babe, unblushingly, "and afterward whenever the admiral came aboard our ship he always made it a point to inquire: 'Where is Mr. Cadwallander?'"

There was a sudden cheering outside which brought the men to their feet. From the windows they saw that the gubernatorial party had arrived and was being welcomed at the railway station.

"Very interesting, indeed," said Hansalt to Cadwallander, his eyes twinkling, although he succeeded in keeping a straight face. "Waiter, another bottle of beer for Mr. Cadwallander."

"Let's drink this up and go out and see the nobs," suggested Evarts, as the waiter brought the fresh round.

But Babe had suddenly disappeared again. Wilton once more got off the stock witticism of the camp. Taking a pace forward and shading his eyes with his hand, he inquired stentoriously—

"Where is Mr. Cadwallander?"

This won the usual laugh, and the men filed out to see the celebration. But first Hansalt got a card which he tied by a pink string to the bottle of beer. He left this in charge of the barkeeper for Babe when next he should return. Upon the card he wrote: "Another bottle of beer for Mr. Cadwallander."

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THE Gold Nugget Hotel was gaudily swathed in bunting in honor of the distinguished visitors. A crowd had gathered before the wide steps that led up to the veranda of the building. Raeburn, Wilton and the others reached this spot in time to see the governor-general and his party who were scheduled to have lunch at the hotel.

There was an expectant pause as the distinguished company neared the steps. Mine host and a committee, who were to go through a prearranged formality of welcome, were nowhere in sight.

Suddenly the hotel door opened and out on to the veranda stepped Soper, the bully from Hoppy's Landing. He was drunk, very drunk, but not too drunk to speak plainly. In his hands he swung a ten-foot scantling in wide, vicious sweeps. His speech was brief—

"To —— with the perlice!"

The governor-general's party came to a halt.

"Very awkward," murmured the distinguished guest.

"Where is Mr. Cadwallander?" quoted Hansalt to Wilton, under his breath.

"Yes, what a glorious opportunity for the little chap."

But Babe was invisible.

Then the bully volunteered another statement—

"To —— with the governor-gen'ral!"

A horrified silence greeted this blasphemy.

"Why the devil don't somebody do something?" snarled Raeburn to Evarts. But Soper had the whip-hand, and was practically unassailable unless through the medium of fire-arms. He continued to swing his scantling while glowering ferociously at all before him.

Then a short stocky figure came drifting around the corner. It was Babe. In his left hand he grasped by the neck a bottle of beer with a white card dangling from it by a pink string. In his right hand he carried a cigarette. He was smiling as usual.

Then came a curious change. Suddenly he caught sight of the gubernatorial party and his face froze to an unknown solemnity. The cigaret dropped from his fingers and his right hand slowly came up to the salute. It was then that Soper offered his third remark—

"To —— with the flag!"

Babe wheeled about suddenly, and—to have seen a dog-chased cat go up a tree supplies a faint comparison for Babe's speed up those steps. In and under the big fellow's guard he went, and the bottle of beer smote the bully's skull with lightning-like precision. Goliath toppled over, drenched in Pilsener and blood.

The cheer that rose to heaven threatened never to cease.

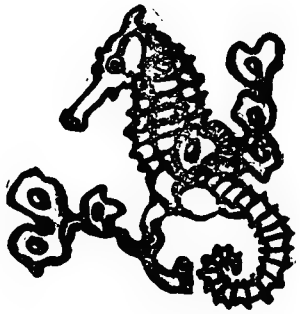
A short, fat man from the governor-general's party stepped forward and held up his hand. Came a curious silence.

"Upon my soul," he exclaimed, with a marked English accent, "if this isn't Mr. Cadwallander!"

"Yes, Admiral Westerby," answered Babe, his hand coming to the salute again.

"Well, Mr. Cadwallander," said the admiral, glancing at the neck of the shattered beer bottle which still remained in Babe's left hand, "hadn't you better have another bottle of beer?"

And with that he hooked his arm into Babe's, and together they entered the hotel.



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Author of "The Waters under the Earth," "The Gleaning," etc.

HE LAY wetly upon what in a moment of creative enthusiasm he had called a raft, but which he had since called many other much less flattering names. He was a wiry young man, clad in about twenty per cent. of a cotton undershirt and perhaps forty per cent. of a pair of dungaree pants, no shoes or hat; and he languidly watched the sun-drenched water splashing upon the rocks of the southeast corner of Pitcairn Island, about twenty yards away, through a monocle that glittered among his alarming whiskers like a heliograph in a forest.

"I am a poet," he mused. "That is, a sort of poet. No, that doesn't describe me—it merely flatters. I am really just a few pounds of matter, energized by a quixotic sunbeam; and I am either forgotten by the gods, or else the gods don't know I am at large in the cosmos.

"This voyage proves it. To try to sail a thing like this raft from Tahiti to Pitcairn was an elaborate form of suicide. They all told me that, and they were right. But I wanted to give the gods a chance to show their intentions. Whether they wanted me to live or die. And what happened? I had the devil's own luck until last night, when that beastly squall carried away my mast and everything.

"Then I drifted to where I am. But I'll be hanged if I'll swim the rest of the distance. I'll navigate this raft to the shore, or burst. But how, when I've even lost my paddle? I'm thirsty, too, and a bit weak; and that bit of a stream wandering down the hillside among the orange-trees is positively maddening.

"But, somehow, I'm not a bit sorry for what I have done; although if people knew why I ran away from England they'd call me all sorts of a fool. Yet any decent man would have done the same. If I could only have said good-by to Jessie—but that was impossible."

He saw again that last morning in England, as he had seen it every day for five years. He was walking about his room, trying to decide upon the words with which he would tell Jessie how much he loved her—the words he should have spoken long before, but which his very natural embarrassment had inhibited. This time, however, he would speak. He would tell Jessie all about it that very evening.

A messenger-boy knocked on his door, with a note from a kindly friend. It was a terrible thing to read: the bank had discovered that the securities hypothecated by the firm of which he was senior partner were forgeries. George and himself were the firm. George was, therefore, a criminal, but unless he confessed they were both involved.

He sat down at his desk in a cold sweat. How could he propose to Jessie now? And he had never seen a penny of the money. Didn't know that George had borrowed it. What on earth had George spent it on? And then George had come in, whistling,

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to break down and cry like a child when confronted with the note.

He had meant to pay the money back, he said. They all mean to do that. He intended to pay the note when it was due, never thinking that the bank would scrutinize the securities. And it was no use trying to raise the money—the bank would prosecute, would never compound a felony, whatever was done.

"But, old man," George had sobbed, "I don't care about myself so much—it's how it will affect Jessie that bothers me."

"What do you mean?" the man now on the raft had asked in a voice he didn't recognize for his own.

"Why," George had faltered, "last night I asked Jessie if there was any understanding between you and her. And she laughed—said she only thought of you like a good old brother; and that you only liked her like a sister, or you would have proposed long ago. So I asked her to marry me, and she said she would. It may seem a rotten thing to have done, but I never expected this to come out. My God, what will Jessie do?"

The man on the raft always shivered at the memory of that agony. Jessie, the girl he worshiped, lost to him, and promised to another man, and that man a thief. Well, there was only one thing for it—Jessie must never know. Any decent man would do anything to save from pain the woman he loved. Both he and George were involved, and if he were to disappear the crime would be charged to him. And then Jessie would never know she loved a thief—she would be happy with the man she loved.

So he had showed George that the bank would not know which partner had substituted the forged certificates, in spite of his making the loan; and then he had told him what he meant to do—for Jessie's sake. Of course George had protested, but the man on the raft had remained firm. He had to hurry, too. He couldn't say good-by to Jessie. He had told George never to let her know the truth, which was rather foolish, because of course George never would.

Then he had gone—a fugitive from justice to save the woman he loved from suffering. And for five years he had lived behind these awful whiskers, in the rags of a beach-comber—for Jessie's sake. Some day, perhaps, when he was very old, he might go back to England and see Jessie. But he would never be able to speak to her.

Well, after all, she didn't love him, and he was something of a fool to keep on loving her the way he did—a bit of a sneak, too, because she was long since married to another man. But what was the infernal raft going to do? Why didn't the gods do something—send along a current, for example? He laughed at the conceit.

An unusual man, poet in many languages, with adoring women desiring him all about the islands, with dusky monarchs begging him to accept their eternal hospitality, he, nevertheless, wandered all about, a true minstrel, with a single eyeglass his only harp and relic of respectability. Better known than many men who had spent their lives there, he was known by many names but never by his own.

BUT behind every desperate chance there is a motive, however obscure it may be; and although the man on the raft was barely aware of it, something more concrete, and very much more charming, than any questioning of the gods had really sent him on that extraordinary voyage from Tahiti to Pitcairn. All of which had no doubt greatly amused the gods—else why had they smiled upon him so kindly, instead of letting him drown?

And so that he might amuse them further, they had more closely tangled the motive of his voyaging with his destiny—and this motive was a woman—what simple folk the gods are, after all, when you get to know them!—a gloriously made, Polynesian girl, with just enough of other blood in her to make her wonderful, who, with increasing agitation, was watching the raft and its beloved occupant.

For more than three years she had loved him, and while he had never actually said so in so many words, she knew that he was anything but indifferent to her love. Being so intimately acquainted with the scene-shifters of life, we know that it was not mere chance that had sent her along the trail to Pitcairn's southeast corner, nor yet was it accident that had caused her bright eyes to rest upon the strange craft and discover who was on it.

At last, it seemed, he had come for her. She would wait among the orange-trees, and rapturously surprise him when he landed. The lovely Summer morning

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became more lovely. But why didn't he swim ashore? Why did he lie on the raft, and do nothing? Was he sick?

In a spasm of apprehension, she ran down to the shore, slipped off her single white garment, laid aside her wreath of flowers, poised for a moment in the purity of a nudity that does not know shame, and dived like a merwoman into the warm water. A few strokes, and she climbed aboard the raft. Squeezing the wet out of the marvel of her hair, she tied it into a knot, and knelt by the poet's side.

"What is it—oh, what is the matter?" for it seemed to her that the man she adored needed the juice of oranges and other things, and needed them badly.

He explained the situation as well as he could—and the one remarkable thing about the Pitcairn people is their excellent knowledge of the English language. She was somewhat shocked by his references to the gods—about whom, as we have seen, he was somewhat ignorant—because like all the islanders she was extremely religious, but she was impressed by his references to the raft.

It did not look beautiful or even useful, but who was she to question his opinion? Beyond doubt, that weird collection of planks held a significance which only time and much thought would disclose to her. It must be saved.

"But why don't you swim, and push it to the shore?"

"By Jove—never thought of that. What a brain you've got, Mary. I was just thinking that I'd have to desert the bally thing, after all the trouble I've had getting it here."

She laughed with delight, slipped overboard and, swimming strongly, began to push the raft slowly shoreward; and the man, without removing his fragments of clothing, but first settling the monocle firmly in its place, followed her.

So for about half an hour they propelled the cumbersome craft together, until it ground against the rocks. But the last effort had so weakened the poet that he could not climb the cliffs without the girl's assistance, so he waited while she slipped into her smock, and made the raft fast with the few feet of rope remaining. Then she helped him up the cliff and made him comfortable, pulled a few oranges from the heavily laden trees, and fed him—her joyous presence vying with the scents and the sunshine to pour strength into him.

But man needs stouter food than oranges, even though they be daintily fed him by loving fingers; and while this drifting piece of human flotsam was a poet he could yet crave a certain stew which Mary contrived most exquisitely—a stew the main ingredient of which was Pitcairn goat—and this solid fact he shortly announced.

Whereupon they began to walk along the trail hand in hand, toward the anything but palatial shack the girl had inherited—a truly ancestral home, the first posts of which had been sunk by the tarry fingers of the original McCoy, one time mutineer of the ill-fated *Bounty*.

Far below them the sea sparkled like a sun-clad army, and the poet's mind harked back to the founding of this isolated colony, now so loyal. He visioned the illiterate sailors of the old British man-of-war, guardedly debating night after night with crude manner of words upon the fate of the officers who had not treated them according to their liking, and who would not allow them to desert the ship to settle down upon some jewel-like island in polygamous bliss.

For of such was the *Bounty* mutiny. What a heaven Polynesia must have seemed to those ill-fared seamen, half of them pressed and the other half with excellent reasons for not wishing to return to England! Small wonder they took the matter into their own hands, but what a sorry mess they made of it. And—here was Mary McCoy, bronze of skin and Irish of eye and hair, smiling love at him. How the ceaseless mill of infinity does grind out events!

A cry startled them, and hurriedly turning a corner they came upon the snake of their Eden. The island missionary—one of those unsanctified things who periodically visited Pitcairn at that time to interfere with the beliefs of the most Christian community imaginable, but who fled the place when it was stricken by an epidemic—was abusing an old Kanaka woman about some lack of duty concerning the supply of vegetables.

He was a tall man, and the poor old crone groveling at his feet, and cringing from the stick in his hand, looked like a tiny, withered monkey uttering unintelligible cries for mercy.

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"That beast. Always hitting somebody. Some day he will be killed. Beats his wife, too. But I slapped his face when he tried to kiss me," snapped Mary, the Irish in her spoiling for a fight.

The poet detested rows, and generally avoided fighting because it disturbed the serenity of his laziness and threatened the safety of his monocle, but here was a case demanding action. Besides, the fellow had tried to kiss Mary.

But it was a very short affair. The preacher tried to defend himself with his stick, but the poet was rather a good boxer. Hobbling away, the old woman turned to enjoy the discomfiture of her tormentor, and while that discomfiture was complete, it lasted hardly long enough to satisfy. The missionary, spitting blood and teeth, looked up at the poet, snarling:

"All right, you tramp. I'll get even, and you'll be sorry for this. Yes, you'll be sorry."

"Why?" drawled the poet, his cultured voice contrasting so oddly with his terrible whiskers and disreputable clothing that the missionary stared at him with peculiar interest, almost forgetting the pain of his situation. "Why, do you think so?" He examined his bruised knuckles carefully. "Have you really got hydrophobia?"

Mary, bubbling with delight, clung ecstatically to the poet's arm and shouted to the now disappearing old woman—

"Did he try to kiss you? I don't wonder you wouldn't let him—with the face of him."

"You, you—" the missionary struggled to his feet, his long black hair frisking like the tail of a horse among the dandruff on his coat collar.

"That will do," warned the poet.

"Oh, yes, you've got the best of it now, but my turn will come—perhaps sooner than you think," the preacher, a pitiable object, talked like one on the verge of tears.

He began to walk away, then turned suddenly.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"That," replied the poet, "is a small matter, but one which I prefer to keep to myself," which was characteristic but undiplomatic, because a beach-comber should always have an alias, not so much for purposes of identification as to curb curiosity.

"I thought so," the missionary spoke thoughtfully. "Don't care to give your name, eh? Well, well—we'll see." And he abruptly left them.

"What is it?" asked Mary.

"Oh, nothing," the poet smiled, but for the moment he was troubled, just as a calm sea is ruffled for a moment by a stray air immediately to become calm again. He regarded the girl quizzically through his abominable eyeglass. "Let's go and eat."

SO THEY continued their walk, forgetting the missionary and all his works—for, indeed, that interlude had only lasted a few minutes, and what are a few minutes to youth and love?—passing the church, where the old *Bounty's* bell still swings and calls to service and alarm, and turning into that collection of wooden cottages where the Pitcairn people live, so reaching Mary's simple cabin, with the bits of things of which she was so pathetically proud.

Many times had she shown the poet those treasures, but he never saw them without a curious dryness of the throat and dimness of his eyes. She was so naive, so very pure, so very beautiful, and so richly poor.

But the tempting stew was bubbling on the stove before the exhibition took place; and when they had eaten she began, as she always did, to ask him questions about England—that wonderful country, where the same Queen Victoria ruled—the queen who sent the Pitcairn people the boat they were almost afraid to use—in a place called London.

Now, few strangers had set foot ashore on Pitcairn, and that few had been of the ignorant sailor class, who answered the many questions from a rather romantic standpoint. There had been one wonderful man who said he had actually seen the queen—a gentleman in a red jersey who ate tobacco—to the great distress of Pitcairn, who looked upon tobacco as a sin—and who described Victoria as a lady dressed entirely in diamonds; but who rather absent-mindedly remarked that English lords—about whom Pitcairn ladies were desperately anxious to hear—dressed just as he did, thus conveying the impression that Queen Victoria was attended by an army of red-sweatered gentlemen.

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But even this romantic sailor had halted when asked if the queen had ever invited him to visit her, so that Pitcairn still waited for an adequate description of the interior of the "Great Palace in London."

So it happened that, as Mary removed the dishes, the old question recurred to her, and she turned abruptly and asked the very comfortable poet—

"Did you ever visit the queen at her house?"

"Why, yes, several times," he answered, without thinking what he was saying.

He was startled by the crash of several dishes—and dishes are an exceedingly valuable commodity on Pitcairn—and by Mary's entire disregard of the loss of half her fortune, as she flung herself at him with the request—

"Tell me—tell me what it's like inside. Is it anything like this? And does the queen wear nothing but diamonds? Uncomfortable, I would think—but, then, she's queen, and different."

"Mary, you've broken some plates," he parried, annoyed at his careless admission.

"Tell me all about it." Mary was breathless with interest.

So the poet told her, as best he could, all about the different residences of English royalty. And he told it well from first hand, while the girl listened entranced. But afterward, although he tried his best to avoid it, came the inevitable question—

"How was it you went to visit the queen?"

He smiled at her. What a darling she was!

"Well, you see, er, I was, er, there was some work to be done, you see."

Her face came very close to his, and she took his hands in hers, examining them smilingly.

"The work must have been making up poetry," she said pointedly.

"Something like that," he prevaricated.

"Then, make me some more—never mind the plates—I've got every bit you made me last time you were here."

So he made rhymes for her, while she did her best to pierce the secret of him, more sure than ever before that there was a secret, and a reason for his wandering about the islands, instead of visiting the queen—for which latter job she considered him so eminently well fitted.

Was it another woman? But no—the poet, for whom she had never had a name, loved her—she felt sure of that. And he was so kind, so good, so very much to be trusted. Yet she would willingly have sacrificed this trust for one word telling of his love—telling her his love was hers. Soul and body of her—so alluring, so much to be desired—were his, if he but asked for them with love.

The afternoon passed, and the poet felt himself yielding. He told himself that he must either completely yield or go away. No fault could be found with his conduct—bah, every fault could be found. He was allowing the girl to go mad with love of him, and keeping silent about the love for her that thrilled him. And because of what? That afternoon the poet came to the conclusion that memory is the greatest enemy of man, is a cumulative hell of his own devising.

A LOVERS' moon flooded the ocean, until the calm expanse of it looked like a great diamond, planed by celestial carpenters to be a fit floor for a ballroom for the angels. The circling horizon was haze-hushed mysteriously, as if with the trailing garments of forgotten dreams; and under and about the trees detached moonbeams poked magical and inquiring fingers, as if seeking something left behind the night before.

But while the poet wallowed in the pit of indecision, Mary felt that she was very near to heaven. They did not speak, for there was no need.

The hours passed.

Then finally—for she was a woman, fiercely affectionate—she whispered—

"You love me?"

"Yes, yes, darling, I do," he murmured, and while temptation offered him delight, and memory mocked him, he asked himself if a decent man could love two women at the same time—and one of them to whom he had never spoken of his love—the wife of another man.

But he was no psychologist to analyze the folly of a complex, and he was too much of a gambler to consider the next generation, yet he wondered at a curious "must not" feeling that seemed to stand between Mary and himself—a feeling that bordered on the supernatural, driving him to temporize further.

"Wait, little woman. Tomorrow I will tell you all about myself."

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"I don't want to hear about—about anything but if you love me. About how much you love me."

Mary was more Polynesian than Irish, but neither is a self-contained race.

"You know I do love you, but—there is something I must tell you," he answered, fondling her hand as they began to walk back to her cabin.

THE night wind began to sigh its melancholy way upward from the sea, and now and then the shrill cry of a lone "bo's'n's bird" startled. Then on a sudden they came upon several men, lighting their way with a lantern.

"Ah, here they are!" The missionary's voice spoke with unholy triumph.

A murmur among the men seemed to agree with something already decided upon. The poet was anything but a coward, and it was no shame to him that this sinister, fanatically religious mob, surrounding the girl and himself in the dark of the setting moon, chilled him with fear. Besides, there was also the shock of contrast—the plunge from the joy of loving into danger. And the terrified girl, clinging to his arm, was an added reason for apprehension.

For who of this reasonless, bigoted crowd would believe in the truth of their relation? For the Christianity of the people of Pitcairn is akin to that of the Inquisition.

But his congenital courage swung to the poet's aid. To protect the woman he loved would be both a duty and a delight.

"What is it, O beater of women?" he asked the missionary, making as if to pass.

"Not so fast, my lord," sneered the preacher. "Lord Shovell—Lord Cloudesley Shovell, is it not? A fugitive from justice."

So, it was out. In some manner the missionary had discovered the poet's secret and his name. It did not matter how.

"Well, you hound, what about it?"

He stepped toward the missionary—who precipitately dodged behind a burly islander—moving as if in a horrible dream, all the dear peace of his *dolce far niente* existence shattered by this contemptible mouther of the Gospel. Until this moment he had never really known anger. Had the missionary not been protected he would have killed him. And through the fog in which he seemed to be enveloped echoed Mary's sobs.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he spoke with forced calm, confronting the silent ring of men.

"Is what this man says true?" asked old Christian, the head man of the island.

"Only about my name. He lies when he calls me a criminal."

"Then why did you run away from England and the woman who loved you?" shrilled the missionary.

"Who loved me?" Shovell spoke incredulously with a joyousness creeping into his voice which he checked as Mary let go his arm and stepped to one side. "No woman loved me in England," he continued quietly, "and the reason for my leaving is my own business."

"Maybe," Christian spoke sadly, for he and Shovell had always been good friends. "Maybe, but an English lord does not leave his home and friends without some very good reason. And the minister says he is telling the truth, and we know that he can not lie."

"Look here, Christian," Shovell snapped, "while I don't have to answer to you or any one here, I don't mind telling you privately just why I did leave home. But I won't tell any one else—except Mary here."

"Don't listen! Don't listen!" The missionary's voice was almost a shriek. "He'll only tell you a pack of lies, Christian."

"Can not you see that this thing simply wants revenge?" drawled Shovell. "I caught him beating old Julia with a stick this morning, and knocked him down. That's why he's telling this yarn."

"But he got your name right," murmured Christian doubtfully.

"Yes, some one must have told him, although I can not think who it could be." Shovell was puzzled.

Christian hesitated. He had been dragged out of his house by the missionary, who had excitedly told him that a desperate criminal was hiding on the island, to find that the desperate criminal was a man he liked exceedingly and whose gentleness was proverbial. Yet it was impossible for him to believe the missionary could lie. What was he to do?

He remembered the story of Solomon, and prayed silently for wisdom. Then, while waiting for the wisdom that never came, he asked Shovell if he intended to marry Mary. It was not a nice question to be asked before a crowd of men whom

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Shovell could not help but consider as of a lower order than himself, yet its very directness relieved it of any impertinent intent.

As a matter of fact Christian was trying to bring the affair to a pleasant termination. He was, of course, distantly related to Mary, and a lord in the family, however far removed, is something very wonderful to a Pitcairn Islander.

Besides, the South Seas had been populated, more or less, by fugitives from justice, who had generally turned into first-class citizens. The old man hoped and expected that Shovell would say "yes." He was very disappointed when he heard:

"The lady and myself have not as yet come to a decision. Be good enough to mind your own business."

To the old man's slow mental processes that reply was equivalent to a verdict of guilty.

"Then it's time you did. And what are we to think about you and a motherless girl—wandering about together like this, at this time of night?"

"You're an old man—" Shovell was furious—"but I advise you not to hint at anything wrong. And if that lying preacher does, I'll find a way to kill him as I would a rat."

But the preacher, having started the fire, was careful to avoid being burned. He had played upon Christian's prejudices to the best of his ability, and his plan was now to leave everything to the old man, upon whose narrow religious outlook he counted. The effect of consanguinity upon the religious belief of a small community is interesting.

Christian felt that pain and punishment were demanded. He did not know it, he felt it, and feeling, not thought, unfortunately rules the world. Besides, only through misery can the human soul win to heaven. That his action, as head man, also caused pain to himself, was an added proof of its rightness.

"I heard you came here on a raft. I don't know how you did it, because Tahiti is far away. The girl must suffer for her sin. I can not let a criminal stay on Pitcairn. The minister had a letter telling you were a criminal——"

"I want to see that letter," demanded Shovell.

"You can not read the minister's private letters. You should be ashamed to ask," reproved Christian.

"I don't believe he has one!" shouted Shovell.

"It gave him your name, and said you were a criminal. The minister can not lie. Do not interrupt me again, or I will have my men gag you. I am going to leave you in God's hands. Take what food and water you need, build you another raft, or find the one you came on, but leave this place before this time tomorrow, or I myself will shoot you, praying to God to forgive me if I am wrong. Girl, go home, and remember when no man of Pitcairn will marry you that you are paying for a sin."

The preacher could not control a chuckle, but before Shovell could act or speak, Mary confronted the crowd.

"You poor fools," she sneered. "Oh, yes, you may beat me for speaking, but I don't care." She paused, but no man spoke, for in some way she held them. "So, no Pitcairn man will want to marry me. How sad, and how soon must they change their minds. For I have been bothered by every unmarried man on the island, and by some of the married ones, too —that sneaking missionary there, for one.

"You fools, to think that I would ever marry one of you—you black men! Keep back. Keep back, you dogs, and let me finish, or I will tell of the things you said to me. So—marry you, when I love a man like this—a white lord! You call him a criminal just because a lying missionary says so.

"And you think I will stay here when he goes away? No, where he goes I go. It may be to death—and you know well that it means death to try to make Tahiti on a raft—but I would rather die lying at this man's feet than live in any other man's arms. I go with him."

"No, dear. I want you, but think what it means. I will come back for you, if I live." Shovell spoke very tenderly.

"She will obey, and stay here," snapped Christian, greatly outraged.

"I will not." Mary sprang forward, and wrested the pistol from old Christian's hand. "I saw you had this," she cried delightedly. "Now, try to stop me going with my man, and I'll shoot the first five who do try. No, the first four, because I won't let that dirty preacher live to try to kiss me again."

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The circle of slow-witted men made as if to close in, but the girl's determined attitude arrested them.

"Wait," shouted Christian. "Let her have the gun, and let her go. The matter is in the hands of the Lord, let us leave it with Him. Leave these two together to their sin. Hell awaits them. Let us go to our homes, and if after this time tomorrow either of these people be found on the island, it is my command, as head man, that they both be shot like dogs. Amen."

"Amen," the crowd echoed solemnly, dispersing and going to their cabins—the missionary, who was much impressed by Mary's handling of the revolver, shielding himself in the mob as it went.

"OH, YOU wonderful girl," Shovell hugged her as he had never hugged a woman before, "it's worth while being lied about when the lie brings such a love as yours. Now, I'll tell you the facts. First, I have never told another woman I loved her. You are the first."

She stopped his lips with kisses.

"I don't care if you have, because I know you only love me now. As for the rest, I don't care if you robbed the queen's palace. But we have much to do—let's go and see about the raft."

"But it isn't fair to take you, darling. They won't hurt you if you stay here."

"Don't you want me?"

"Of course."

"Then I am going with you."

"And you trust me—don't believe I ever committed a crime?"

"If you talk like that—" Mary sought a sufficient punishment for his thinking she could doubt him—"if you talk like that, you bad boy, I'll—I'll—I'll spank you, I will—even if you are a lord. And you are, aren't you?" she ended, rather appalled at such a possibility.

"I am," replied Shovell gravely. "And you're a lady—my lady."

"Yes, but—I'm only a very little white—about a ninth," she murmured.

"White, you darling—what's the color of the skin got to do with it? It's the soul that counts, and yours is white clear through."

She put her arms around his neck, whispering:

"I like you to say that. The color of the soul is what counts. Oh, I'm so glad you say my soul is white, because when I die I'll still be yours, and then I'll be as white as any woman. All the angels are white, aren't they? Except in hell—they're black there."

"I, er, believe so," he answered, "but——"

She interrupted him with immense energy.

"Let's get away from these people as soon as we can. If we hurry, we can get the food and water by daylight, and then, if the raft you made hasn't broken away, we can start on the morning wind."

"Aye, aye, Captain," he laughed; "you're in charge of the ship—signed on for life. What's the orders?"

"In my house is rope—" she hesitated at the sudden realization of all she was leaving, then stamped her foot angrily at allowing such an unworthy thought, and looked anxiously at Shovell to see if he had noticed it.

"The rope, sir," he repeated grinning.

"Yes," she breathed a sign of relief, "take it, and if the raft is where we left it tie the rope around it, so as to make it stronger. While you do that I will get the food and water jars—I can fill the jars at the little stream near where the raft is. Hurry—let's race!"

So began a great business of getting ready for what the old head man called in his prayers that night "the voyage of death." With that amusing lack of reverence which certain minds call "piety," he had "talked" the matter over with his God, and actually culled a glow of "righteousness" from the thought of his sending the two lovers to almost certain death. It may be well to interpolate that the people of Pitcairn, of the period of Christian's administration, manifested the curious anomaly of speaking perfect English while thinking from the narrow standpoint of the savage just converted to Calvinism!

Great luck, coupled with excellent steering by sun and stars—he had no compass—had enabled Shovell to sail his crude craft to Pitcairn; but such luck was hardly likely to be his again. Indeed, only the possibility of being picked up by a ship, where ships were few and far between, loomed in Christian's prayers as a possible obstruction to what he looked upon as the wrath of God, duly vented by himself as God's servant.

But the girl and the poet showed no

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consciousness of danger. They spiced their hurried preparations with laughter and kisses, denying fear as they denied fatigue and want of sleep. The raft was still bumping gently against the rock where Mary had made it fast, and Shovell lashed the rope around it until it looked more than ever like a package of possibilities.

But the danger to the girl irked the man. Delightful as was her presence, he would have been happier if he could have persuaded her to stay behind; but he realized that further discussion would be as barren of result as it would be offensive to Mary.

Cold roast goat, bread and great provision of that dainty indigenous to Pitcairn, bananas, dried like figs, were all lashed on a raised platform as near amidships as the queer shape of the raft permitted. It might have been better to have made another raft, in spite of the shortness of time, but a certain affection for the old one, coupled with its hitherto lucky existence and a desire to get away as soon as possible, vetoed that idea. But the heavy wooden chocks they nailed around their water jars were of more hindrance to disintegration than all the lashings of rope—a fact overlooked by both the hasteful lovers.

Then came the making of a new sail from the ancestral bed-linen of the ancient family of McCoy, and the stretching of it along a yard made from the limb of an orange-tree; and before daylight their ship was ready for sea. But never did man and woman embark with less chance of reaching port, yet never did man and woman embark with more of delight and laughter.

They were together—that was enough—although it was likely that the first rough sea would send each plank of the raft upon a voyage separate and distinct from that of its fellow planks, a fact Mary pointed out while commenting gleefully upon the distinctive weirdness of every knot tied by Shovell with much winding of rope. And there were other marvels which they whimsically discovered afresh, and enjoyed like two children in the wonderful toy-shop of a dream. Then, before casting off, to Mary's delight, Shovell decided that it was necessary they should propitiate a deity of his own invention whom he called "the bibulous god of the chances." He therefore made a small fire on the rock, upon which with intense gravity he laid a banana, shouting to the wondering birds:

"To thee, O god of the chances, we sacrifice this poor unfortunate banana. Like the important part of all sacrifices, the banana has nothing to say in the matter. And we start upon our voyage dependent upon thy drunken attention. Lift thine eyes above the rim of thy cup, thou Bœotian deity, and be with us—give us a chance, O god of drunken humors, and—oh, bother, that's all I can make up. Give me a kiss, sweetheart," he concluded, boylike, kicking the fire into the sea and jumping aboard the raft.

And while Mary cast off the painter, he began to push the raft into the breaking dawn.

As yet there was not a breath of wind. The night breeze had died, and the day breeze seemed to wait. A patch of ragged clouds which looked, as Shovell said, as if they had been out all night, crowded the eastern horizon in a disturbed way, while above their gloominess a pale glow heralded the coming sun.

In the half-light, the island seemed to exhale, like something asleep, the odor of fruit, flowers and spices, and as the pole in Shovell's hands pushed against the rock to its length, and the end dropped into the still water, hundreds of startled fish flashed in the heavy green.

ACROSS the calm face of the Pacific a flock of flying-fish broke for cover, pursued by hungry bonita seeking breakfast, and an excited gull followed, looking for scraps. For a moment it grew darker, and a chilly breath of air hurried across the ocean with what seemed uncommonly like the fussy importance of a little man announcing the coming of a great one.

The wonderfully contrived sail of the raft shook irritably, then, as the air passed, flapped with annoyed disgust against the crooked mast; while the corners of the rocks and cliff took on the shape of distorted human faces, aping interest in everything. So it all seemed to the two lovers, sitting side by side, waiting for the wind; both of them a little overwrought by the strain they had tried to ignore.

Suddenly the dark was gone, as if wiped away with a sponge by a great hand. The real wind of the morning filled the sail, which tugged healthily, rattling and testing the gear. Shovell headed the raft out from

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the land, and their eventful voyage had commenced.

"Your watch below, sweetheart," he announced, as he settled the course. "Wrap up in one of those blankets, and I'll call you for breakfast in four hours. After that, I'll sleep, and we'll keep watch and watch."

Mary made no protest. She was already nodding, and after the usual rites she curled up among the blankets and went to sleep at once, while Shovell filled a thoughtful pipe.

"Seven hundred years," he mused. "For seven hundred years the Shovells had an honorable name; and I, the last of them, threw it away as if it had no value—because I loved a woman who didn't love me. Yes, they'll close the book, the title will become extinct, with the last wearer of it branded as a thief—unless George tells the truth, which he won't.

"And I hope for Jessie's sake he won't. Otherwise, all I did goes for nothing. Yet I haven't lost. They'll call it 'miscegenation,' and if I am not arrested I'll be called a beach-comber. Arrested—the devil. What would I do then? To tell the truth would kill Jessie, and to let them send me to prison would just about kill Mary. I must not let them get me. But likely enough there'll be no chance—it's a long way to Tahiti. . . Pull, you terrier, pull."

The wind was rising, and the raft careened before it like a dissipated crab, leaving a wake which must have given every observant fish a headache. But she was flopping along at a good four knots an hour, and holding together. Pitcairn was clear, before its lazy inhabitants had left their beds. The god of the chances had evidently been pleased with the burnt offering. But if Shovell had only been a better sailor, he could have trimmed the raft into sailing at least a knot faster.

And then the question he had crowded out of consciousness seethed out of his under-consciousness like a bubble rising suddenly to the surface of a deep pool.

"How in —— did the parson get my name? There seems to be only one way—by the missionary schooner. It hits Pitcairn about once every ten months. But how did the schooner get it? Must have been some inquiry. But, surely, I don't look much like what the society columns called 'one of the best-dressed men in London.' The preacher must have guessed.

"Ah, I have it—the eyeglass. That's it. Scotland Yard sent my photo around—all over the world, I expect, because George stole an awful pile of money—and the preacher guessed me because of the glass. It's got to go. But I'll feel awfully lonely without it."

He pulled the betraying ornament out of its place, looked at it with kindly consideration for a moment, and then pitched it into the sea. It flashed in the sun, and disappeared.

"Like the life of a human," he murmured, "just a flash, called consciousness, and then into the depths. I wonder if Mary will recognize me without it?"

A wave broke amidships as if bent on solving that intricate problem, splashing the girl into a charmingly lazy opening of her blue eyes. For a moment she lay curled up among the blankets like a sleepy kitten, blinking prettily at Shovell's struggles with his unwieldy rudder, then she sprang into concerned activity.

"You've lost it."

"Noticed it at once, eh?"

"But why—all the pictures of lords wear it?" Mary was actually distressed.

"Yes, my dear, but this particular lord does not wish to look the part any longer—there are too many inquisitive missionaries loafing around the South Seas. Do you see?"

"Yes, my *Tuan*—it is better so. Now I will get breakfast."

"Great Scott," he thought, "she's the most wonderful woman ever born—not a word of question, when any other woman would be crazy to know all about what the parson got in his letter. Here's one married man who is going to live in peace. Eh, ho, I'm sleepy."

But Mary's genius served to keep him awake—rapidly preparing breakfast under difficulties insurmountable to the average cook. Then she bent her Venus-like body to the steering oar while he ate, and, watching her, his many attempts at describing her poetically all ended in an admission of defeat.

"Like all the most beautiful things, you can not be described, sweetheart. To word-paint a wonderful sunset is silly; all you can say about a diamond is that it shines; if you tried to tell a man who had never seen a rose what it is like, and afterward

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showed him a rose and a cabbage, he wouldn't know which was the rose and which the cabbage—assuming, of course, that he had never seen cabbages.

"And you are like that—wonderful beyond telling, my lady. We will be married in Tahiti. The minister and the witnesses shall know you as Lady Shovell. After that we will have to disappear. And you are quite content to go with me, believing that I am not a criminal, just because I say I am not?"

"Cloudesley," she said gravely, "love that does not trust is not love, and the woman that listens to, or believes, tales about her lover is not worth loving."

He nodded.

"But the average woman is more concerned about what people say about the man she is thinking of marrying than she is about what she thinks about him. Which is about the most awful sentence I ever managed," he finished laughing.

"Now go to sleep," she ordered, "for we are going to enjoy this wonderful voyage."

But the voyage was not destined to be either wonderful or prolonged. The breeze that had carried them away from Pitcairn Island was not any ordinary morning wind, for it did not die before nine o'clock, but stayed with them, gradually increasing, long after the island faded from sight. The bank of ragged clouds they had noticed just before sunrise had held a promise of sinister intent, and, while Shovell slept, a half gale rose to stagger the raft.

But Mary held on without waking him, and while she steered she reached the summit of her happiness. At her feet, wrapped in her blankets, lay the one man in all the world. And he was hers. Hers to be loved, to be slaved for—if he would let her—to be obeyed, to be petted. And every effort of steering, although the rough oar tore at her like a frightened wild thing, thrilled her, because her toil allowed the man to rest.

BUT the wind passed beyond Mary's control. To keep the raft dead before the wind, unless she was quite sure it shifted, had been Shovell's order; but as the sea got up the raft steered much as a drunken man walks, while the hastily constructed rigging strained fearsomely. Here and there small holes appeared in the sail, until it looked like a medley of independent flutterings kept together by a miracle, and suddenly the wind shifted fully eight points, coming down upon the unfortunate raft with almost hurricane force, and deluging her with the foam of a cross sea.

At the same moment, what was left of the sail went away to leeward like a tattered pocket handkerchief, and the mast and yard fell in a mess of raffle. There was no need to waken Shovell—a piece of flying rope had done it very effectively, flicking him like a whip—and although Mary hauled in the steering-oar coolly enough, she hurried to nestle in Shovell's arms for what looked very much like the last time.

For there was nothing they could do. A more skilful sailor might have made shift to make a sea-anchor with the broken spars and one of the blankets, but even that would only have been a sort of pastime. For what use to keep the raft head to sea when it was rapidly breaking up—when the waves were making clean sweeps over it, and each plank was struggling to get free of its neighbors?

Their food and water jars had gone, and, while the sea was not cold, their state was a miserable one. The chafing of the planks had cut the binding rope, and instead of affording protection the raft was rapidly becoming a source of danger. Very soon it would go to pieces, and to swim among the wave-tossed planks would be exceedingly dangerous. To jump overboard was the safest thing to do, but they were naturally loath to do it.

"Shall we try to get one plank loose from the others, and swim with it?" Shovell shouted above the howl of the wind.

Mary shook her head.

"No. Better swim without it. The plank will bring the sharks."

Shovell rather doubted that, and was also rather skeptical about the voracity of deep-water sharks, but if the girl felt that way about it they would have to swim away from the drifting planks. Because it is almost as bad to expect a shark as actually to see one. But what, after all, was the use of swimming? There was no place to head for. No, it was just a case of swim, swim until one of them became exhausted, and then. . . Well, they should die together, anyhow. The gods had denied them life, but they had no power over death.

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The man held her close to him in one long passionate, farewell embrace. Their lips clung. It was just another of life's sardonic jests—in the joy and strength of their youth they had found a wonderful love; the cup of bliss had been held up to them, but as they reached for it the unseen hand that controls had dashed it from their taking.

So Shovell faced the end with a bitter understanding of its injustice, believing that it was the end, while Mary, with the simple faith of a child, was quite sure that, after a few hours' struggle in the angry sea, they would pass together, still loving, into a fairer and a happier world. Surely, if the world's wisdom is true wisdom, it is better to be ignorant!

They looked into each other's eyes, and both smiled bravely. Then, balancing a moment on the heaving planks, they dived as far as they could, and began to swim slowly head to sea and away from the dangerous planks. Then, to add to their misery, the rain came down in sheets—for while the rain somewhat leveled the sea, it was icy cold. And as they swam their minds were busy—Mary's occupied chiefly with the hope of some sort of rescue, for her faith never wavered, and with the dream of the future when she and Shovell would be together, far from all who would seek to harm them. She smiled dreamily as the spray dashed into her face, fancying she was kissing the tiny fingers of the tots who would be theirs.

What remarkable children they would be. Not at all like other people's children! How could they be, when their father was such a man as Shovell, and a lord, too? She, of course, would be a lady; but that was, after all, but a detail. The crowning glory, the ultimate, uttermost realization of joy would be in being the mother of *his* babies. That were bliss indeed.

But Shovell was not thinking of babies. He was thinking of the unhappy fate that was his—that just as love came to him he was destined to lose it. First Jessie, and now the wonderful girl by his side. The thought of Jessie leading to other thoughts, he tried resolutely to put her out of his mind, by focusing his attention on the futility of continuing to swim.

He was no quitter, and he would go on until he could go no farther; but it did seem such a waste. Besides, death might be rather interesting. There might be something after death. So, since there was no chance of rescue, why not die at once—why not go and see if there was anything. But he would give the wonderful woman by his side no inkling of his thoughts. What a darling she was. With a smile for him with every wave they surmounted. His love for her seemed to increase, although such a thing seemed impossible. She was the acme of creation, the master effort of a master craftsman.

He turned on his back, and held out his arms; she glided into them and he hugged her to his breast. They sank and swallowed some water, but the embrace was worth it. And as they came up laughing Shovell felt shamed of his recent thoughts, and became fiercely determined to live, to reach some place where he could have this marvel of a woman for his own.

With the setting of the sun the hasty Summer gale began to moderate rapidly, and the vindictive waves relaxed the intensity of their batterings. Suddenly Mary raised herself out of the water and looked 'round the short horizon. The rain ceased and the sea went down. Again the girl lifted out of the water like a seal.

"I see a ship," she cried.

He smiled, shaking his head.

"Never mind, sweetheart, it will soon go. Presently you will see more things. Because you are so good you will see the angels."

And he steeled himself for what he expected to be the worst agony of his life—Mary dying, far from land and delirious. But to please her he raised himself and looked. The next moment he was shouting and waving his hand frantically.

"Take off your shirt and wave that," she cried.

"You flatter the fragment," he said, his sense of humor never deserting him; and with her help, and some further disintegration of the garment, he managed to get it off, when they took turns waving it.

AND luck was with them. In the growing dusk such a small object as a swimming man is only seen by chance, but it so chanced that the officer on the bridge of the yacht saw the waving shirt, and his binoculars showed him two people swimming.

Much bustle resulted. A boat was swung

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out on the davits and manned. Blankets and brandy were provided. The yacht's owner, deeply concerned, spoke to the captain.

"Poor things. What do you think they are?"

"Well, miss, some sort of natives, I expect. That gale would have hardly capsized a decent-sized ship, although it did blow a bit stiff for a while, but a native scow would go easy enough. Stop her. All right, mister, lower away the boat."

The steamer hove to about a hundred yards from the swimmers, and Shovell was busy with many speculations. What if the steamer were bound to some place where there was a regular police force? Was some dirty detective going to prevent his marrying Mary, after all? And what sort of a tale could he tell? Who would believe he had tried to sail from Pitcairn to Tahiti on a raft? And the questions he would be forced to find an answer for. He would have to get on the right side of the captain. Get him to pass close to some uninhabited island—near enough for Mary and himself to swim ashore. But how on earth would he manage it?

"Pretend not to understand English," he cautioned Mary, who nodded understandingly. "Here comes the boat—thank the Lord."

The sympathetic sailors lifted the bedraggled two out of the water, passing looks of comprehension from one to the other—their estimate based upon Mary's color and Shovell's whiskers. Mrs. and Mr. Beach-comber, blown out to sea, and capsized, while fishing for the daily fare. But where were all the little beach-combers? The mate offered brandy, and helped them to the needed blankets; and being a gentleman he neither stared nor asked questions.

A side ladder swung from the yacht's rail, but both Shovell and the girl had to be helped up the side, and it was all they could do to stand when they reached the deck, where the interested owner waited with the captain.

"Where do you wish them put, miss?" asked the old man.

"Oh, let the girl be taken care of by the stewardess. Or, if the man is her husband——"

Shovell was wiping his head and face with the help of a kindly sailor, while Mary waited, remembering his caution. All was as had been expected, when suddenly the girl's world seemed to be falling in ruins. For Shovell was looking at the owner of the yacht as he so often looked at Mary—his eyes full of love for her. And then, his voice breaking like that of an overwrought schoolgirl, he cried—

"Jessie!"

And the owner of the yacht was sobbing incoherently in his arms. And then Mary staggered against the rail, bowed under the awful weight of her color.

She dimly heard the captain ordering the crew forward, and then the other woman's voice—all like the mockery of some hideous nightmare:

"I have looked all over for you. Sent word to the different missionaries, because you hinted to George you might go to the South Seas. Don't you see, I never loved any one but you? George never asked me to marry him, and I wouldn't if he had. He tricked you, you generous darling, and he afterward confessed. Oh, you splendid boy—how you must love me to give up everything for me the way you did! But I have found you again. Do you understand, or are you too tired?"

"For five years I have believed you were married," Shovell said dully, looking at Mary's back.

And then the significance of Mary's presence came to the English girl.

"Is she—she—your—wife?" she asked brokenly.

Shovell sighed a long, tremulous sigh.

"No, but she is going to be."

And then the English girl, with that marvel of self-abnegation which only the thoroughbred can accomplish, went to Mary and took both her hands. She spoke gently, but her voice kept breaking in sympathy with her heart:

"I—I congratulate you, dear. You—will be very—happy—" Her position as hostess came to her aid. "But, you poor child, how tired and worn out you must be. Let me get you some tea, and put you to bed."

THE following evening Shovell sat in a deck-chair, struggling with his problem. His love for Jessie, even stronger than it had been five years before when he had given up everything to make her happy, was no greater than his love for Mary. He felt that circumstance

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had tricked him into a situation beyond the power of man to endure, involved him in a problem to which there was no solution. But he was not ashamed. Indeed, he was rather proud that two such perfect women loved him.

He looked up to find Mary standing by his side. Then with her inimitable grace she slipped into his arms and kissed him lingeringly.

"I am glad to be loved by a man who can love as you love," she whispered. "To give up everything so that the one you love may be happy is a great thing—is the sign of real love, that is not selfish. Look at my feet!"

"Why, Mary?"

He was astonished, for the one part of her that failed of beauty was her feet. And he remembered how she could walk barefooted among the pineapples to cut one for his breakfast, when he required heavy leggings and boots to protect his skin from their thorns.

"And do you remember old Julia?"

"Of course, sweetheart. But why do you ask?"

"Because she is so old and withered and ugly—like a monkey, isn't she?"

"Yes. But she must be a very old woman."

The girl looked into his eyes, almost pityingly, it seemed.

"She has borne three children," she went on.

"Yes?"

"Yes, Cloudesley. And she must be thirty-five years old—for the Pitcairn women look like that at thirty-five."

He didn't answer.

"When I am thirty-five—in fifteen years—I will look even worse than old Julia, because of my ninth white blood. Will you love and kiss me then?"

"Why, you darling, of course." He meant it, as he kissed her.

"Yes, you might. But what would our children think of their mother—in England?"

"Mary, stop it."

"Look," she persisted, "you at your best, with an old, ugly black woman, walking on the street in London. Does it look nice to you?"

"Mary," he said gravely, "there isn't a better woman in the world than you, or one whom I love more or owe more to. Don't talk like this."

"Why did you leave England?"

"Because—but you know?"

"Yes, I know—because your soul is white. Because one with a white soul thinks about the happiness of the one loved, and forgets self. Isn't that so?"

"Y—yes."

"You said my soul is white?"

"Why, darling, you know it is. Of course I said so."

"Which is best for you—which is best for the man I love—to marry a white girl, who will be lovely until old, or to marry me, who will be withered and done at thirty-five?"

He tried to get up, but she restrained him.

"Mary, I positively refuse to continue to talk like this. You will always be beautiful to me."

She kissed him again.

"That's it; I always want you to think of me as being beautiful, and you will. But the white soul thinks about the happiness of the loved one. Like this."

She kissed him, until he thought the delight of it would never end, then with a swift movement she disengaged herself from his arms, looked at him with unutterable adoration, sprang lightly to the rail, and plunged overboard.

The sudden confusion gave place to orders quickly executed, but as Shovell struggled with the sailor who prevented his following Mary he heard the captain's cry:

"It's no use. If she wanted to swim, we could get her; but she doesn't want to, and she will not come up again."

And Shovell was telling the sailor, over and over again, like a talking-machine that knows not what it says—

"It's true, it's true—he's right!"

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LITTLE PAL

by

HAPSBURG LIEBE

Author of "The Little Trapper of Nobody's Country," "A Man's Woman," etc.

THE boy sat on the edge of the rotting river-wharf, with his bare and dirty legs hanging over, and with the Summer sunlight full in his browned and dirty face. He was reflecting gloomily upon the miseries and uncertainties of life in a city such as New Orleans. Reformation was the order of the day, and rescue societies had grown so active of late that he couldn't sell papers because of them; he couldn't even appear on the streets because of them; he couldn't do anything because of them!

They had had him once; they wouldn't let him fight, or swear, and they had washed his face and combed his red hair as though he were a poodle. "Old Gyp" wasn't capable of bringing up a boy properly, they had told him.

Old Gyp, peace be to her ashes, was dead these ten days, and he was wholly, totally friendless. Perhaps that was his real trouble. The old fortune-teller wasn't his mother, but she had loved him. And now—there wasn't a soul to remind him daily that the lines in his left hand pointed to a future of wealth and happiness.

Soft footfalls came from somewhere behind him. He turned half-way around and saw a woman whom he at once recognized as one of the members of a rescue outfit, and he sprang up and ran from her. The woman shrugged.

"The redhead!" she exclaimed.

Yes, Old Gyp, mother of the river crooks, was dead; and most of the crooks themselves—he knew them every one—had fled before the reform wave. New Orleans, alas, had degenerated. The lad made his way out of the city and along a sand-ballasted railroad, and Fate led him far into a wide and flat land of pines and hanging mosses. On the next night but one, he slept, too utterly weary to give heed to the pangs of hunger, in a dilapidated and mildewed hut that had once been a part of a logging-camp.

As bright dawn came filtering through the scrubby, whispering pines the woodsmen had left, he awoke. The other side of the floor gave forth a creak, and he saw that he had not slept alone in the hut. The figure of a tall young man, dressed in rather expensive but now rumpled and dusty Summer clothing, rose and went to the doorless doorway.

Wondering mildly, the boy sat up without a noise. The man yawned and sat down on the doorsill. In the fast-growing morning light, the lad could see that the man was anything but a tramp, and that his strong face was troubled. Then the stranger went into his clothing and came back with something at which he stared and stared. This aroused the redhead's curiosity; he crept silently across the floor and peered over one of the gray-clad shoulders.

It was the photograph of one of the prettiest young women in this good-natured, easy-going Southland.

"Buh!" exploded the boy, rising. "You softy!"

Tom Harrell might have been startled at that, but he certainly did not show any signs of it. He slipped the picture back into his pocket, and turned his head slowly.

"Hello, 'Red,'" he smiled. "I didn't know you were anywhere near."

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"You know my name, all right," grinned Red. "Everybody always called me that. What's your name, mister, and where you goin' to?"

"My name is Tom. I'm headed for a logging-camp a few miles up a branch road that meets the main line not far down the track. Where are you going, son?"

"Me? The same place, I reckon. But I didn't know anything about it till you happened here to tell me. They'll have somethin' to eat there, anyways. Y'see, I've got no home, nor no folks."

With his gaze riveted absently on a starving stray dog that had come poking up, Red told Harrell of Old Gyp, his foster-mother, and of the rescue people. Harrell then took from one of his pockets a bundle of food of the kind they sell in railroad restaurants, and gave exactly half of it to the boy; and that was where Red, who was more accustomed to kicks and cuffs than to having kindness shown him, lost his whole heart to Tom Harrell.

The dog whined, and promptly got the other half of the food. It gulped down the three sandwiches in three gulps, and quickly slunk off, poor ingrate, into the bush. In his turn, Red offered to divide with Harrell.

"Eat it," came the order; and the lad ate it.

When he had thus breakfasted, Red tugged at the soiled gray sleeve of his new friend.

"Tom," he said, "I ain't never had a real pal but Old Gyp. I'm lonesome. Awful lonesome. Le's you and me be pals, Tom."

The man smiled amusedly. But his alert gray eyes became altogether serious when he looked down into the boy's eager blue ones. He put his right hand around, and Red clasped it tight.

"Till death?" dramatically asked Red.

Harrell laughed. Solely to please his youthful companion, he repeated—

"Till death."

A few minutes later they were walking toward the logging-camp of a certain pine lumber company. Harrell made the greater part of the journey in grim silence, and Red didn't quite dare to ask what it was that weighed so heavily on his big pal's mind.

Harrell was given a place in a woods gang, and the other found a job as kitchen boy. Nobody asked Harrell any difficult questions, which, no doubt, pleased him more than a little.

Like most other logging outfits, this outfit had a bully; and, on the fifth day of their stay there, Red took note of the fact that the bully, whose name was Ganley, had recognized Tom Harrell. Red became inquisitive at the first opportunity.

"I didn't know him very well," frowned Harrell. "Back in War—that is, back where I came from, Ganley was a plantation boss; he used to come to my office on Sunday mornings, always with a whisky headache——"

Red's friend stopped talking abruptly, as though he feared he had said that which he shouldn't have said. The boy's eyes widened.

"Was you a doctor?" he whispered. "I won't tell, big pal, if you don't want me to."

"Yes, son, I was a doctor. And you mustn't tell."

The very next time Bill Corden's loggers sat down to breakfast, the bully boxed the boy's ears because he was a trifle late with the fried potatoes. Red tried hard to fight back, and made a dismal failure of it; then he looked toward Harrell, who was already fairly boiling, and reminded him—

"Till death, Tom!"

Harrell entered a protest, and Ganley wanted a battle immediately. To make a long story short, Ganley got his battle, and—Harrell came out of it the victor! And here is where he began to pay for having been Red's friend.

TWO mornings later, Red missed ihs big pal when the timberjacks filed in for breakfast. He sought out the superintendent at the table, and whispered into his ear—

"What's 'come o' Tom Burbage?" Burbage—that was Harrell's assumed name.

The superintendent bit off half a heavy biscuit.

"Some sheriff got him last night, the rounder!" he growled with his mouth so full that his words came smotheredly. "Took him back to Warrenton, at the other side o' this State. Hurry up with my coffee; and tell the cooky if he sends me stained water, I'll drownd him with it. Git, you rat! What're you standin' there a-gawpin' at me for?"

If he had waited until Red brought coffee for him he would have been waiting at dawn of doomsday. Red went out, into the early sunlight, into the sweet-scented

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woodland, and sat down on a moss-covered log to think.

At first he was inclined toward blaming Harrell for not waking him to tell him. But he soon forgot all about that. Then he began to reason. His struggle with the world for his own survival in the scheme of things had sharpened his wits, which were good wits to begin with.

Harrell, he told himself in his own way, had been accused of some crime back in Warrenton, and he had fled simply because he had had no chance if he stayed to fight it out. It was Ganley the bully who had told—and this was all because of him, Red!

The cooky was a negro. Red went straight to him.

"Isham," said he gravely, "how many miles to Warrenton?"

"'Bout fo' hunderd, I s'pects, sonny. Why?"

"Fix me up all the grub you can find it in your heart to gi' me, and you can c'lect my wages," Red said calmly. "I got to go to Warrenton, and I got to walk the most part o' the way there."

Isham grinned, laughed boisterously, then became suddenly sober.

"Dat new man, Mistah Tom, he's sho' quality people. I knows 'em when I sees 'em, sho'. Is you goin' to Mistah Tom, sonny?"

"Yeuh," nodded the redhead. "You sure guessed it. I got to help him out. He helped me out, y'see."

The superintendent and his loggers had gone to the woods, and Red carried off enough eatables to impede his traveling.

It was not four hundred miles to Warrenton, but it was two. Red walked half the way, and stole rides aboard freight-trains the other half. The time of this, the longest journey he had ever made, was not far from a fortnight. His food was gone long before he had covered a third of the distance, and hunger drove him to begging his meals.

At sundown of a fine July day, he arrived in Warrenton, footsore, weary, hungry, but no whit less determined to be of service to his friend.

Red walked straight into the business section, and forthwith began his search for the jail. The soft Southern dusk had gathered when he found it. He turned his tired but eager eyes upward to a row of lighted, barred windows and called out—

"Tom!"

The face of a man appeared at one of the windows. But it was not Red's Tom. It was the face of a mulatto.

"Whatcha want, li'l' white trash?" he demanded sourly.

The boy's fists curled into a pair of hard knots; he went white with anger.

"I dare you out here!" he snapped; and the mulatto shrugged his shoulders at the irony of the challenge, and disappeared.

Red went to the blank end of the building, turned and went to the front. The main entrance was open, and he could see down an electrically lighted corridor, in which a guard with a short-barreled shotgun in the crook of his left arm paced to and fro. The laughing and joking of a few of the prisoners came to Red's strained ears.

Red walked slowly up the steps. The guard faced about and confronted him.

"What is it, son?"

"I want to see the man what the sheriff brung here 'bout two weeks ago from Corden's pine camp," announced the lad. "I got 'portant news for him, mister."

The guard called the sheriff from a pigeonhole of an office to his right. In another minute Red was standing in the light of Tom Harrell's good smile, and Tom was holding both his grimy hands through the bars of the cell's door.

"I've come to help you, Tom," said the boy. "What was it you done, Tom?"

"It was good of you to come, of course," Harrell replied warmly, ignoring Red's question. "But you can't help me any, little pal."

Red gulped pitifully. "Little pal!" Never before had anybody called him that, not even Old Gyp. It was eulogy and blessing, and a psalm to his soul. The next thing he knew his hands were gripping two of the worn-bright iron bars until his knuckles showed a pale yellow through the dirt that covered them, and Tom Harrell was writing closely in pencil something in the way of a message on the back of an old envelope.

Then Harrell came back to the door and held out the envelope, which he had folded once.

"Take this," said he, "to Colonel Shortridge's house. The sheriff will show you where it is. Ask for Miss Althea, and give it to her; be sure you don't give it to

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anybody else. And if you are my pal, do exactly what she tells you to do. Promise, and hope you may die if you don't keep it?"

Immediately and without question Red promised, and hoped he might die if he didn't keep it. The sheriff, who had been watching from a little distance, censored the note and passed it as it had been written.

Ten minutes later Red was standing before a great old mansion whose downstairs was brightly lighted, whose wide lawn was fragrant with an incomparable blend of the perfumes of roses and Cape jasmines. In his right hand the note Tom Harrell had written was gripped so hard as to be badly crumpled. But if he had known what was in that note, he might not have gone on with it.

Then he screwed his courage up tight, and walked toward the big oaken front door. He failed to see the bell's button, and rapped loudly and nervously. A stern-looking, proud-looking man, slender and smooth-faced and more than half gray, came in response to the summons.

"M-Miss Althy," began Red, inclined to stammering, "is she at home?"

He shifted his weight from one bare foot to the other, and swallowed and swallowed. Colonel Shortridge faced about and called his daughter's name, and she came within the moment. When Red saw the young woman, he stared at her amazedly; she was the original of the photograph he had seen in the hands of Tom Harrell! Her eyes were of the bluest blue, and her brown hair held shimmering auburn tints; she was prettier than her picture.

"Here's a ragamuffin," the colonel said in a merciful aside, "who wishes to see you, Althea. Some charity business, I take it."

With that, he was gone back to his newspaper. Althea smiled at the boy, and it came near to taking him off his feet. She was of that fine, high-up type of femininity that he had been accustomed to seeing flash past him in big limousines whose drivers wore livery.

"What is it?" she asked in a voice filled with kindliness.

Red swallowed once more, and gave her the message. She held it up to the light and read it almost at a glance, took her turn at crumpling it in her hands, and went a little pale. Then she began to stare at Red with a stare that he could not begin to understand.

Finally, she said to him—

"Come with me."

SHE went into the house, and he followed her gingerly. Suddenly he came to himself and saw that he was standing before a big bowl of warm water, and he washed his face and hands and dried them on a towel that was as soft as silk. After this, he was taken to a great dining-room and seated at one end of a table that was heavy with china and silverware, and an old black woman placed loads of food—real food—before him. For a moment, he forgot even his pal, and fell to stuffing himself as though he had not the slightest hope of ever again seeing anything to eat.

When his appetite was halfway satisfied, he turned his attention to Miss Althea, who, sitting at one side of the table, had been watching him with a deep and pitying interest. Red now noted that, for all that dazzling smile of hers, she was by no means happy.

"What," he asked, "did Tom say for me to do?"

Althea Shortridge straightened out Harrell's note, and read it again; and this was what she read:

DEAR ALTHEA:

This is the one human being on earth, it seems, that has any use for me or any faith in me. The last favor I shall ever ask of you, I ask for him: Find a home for him, and try to keep him in it until he is accustomed to it. I don't know who he is, and no more does he himself, but for all that there is pure gold in him. TOM.

"He says," Althea answered, "that you must stay in a good home I am going to find for you."

Red's face went almost the color of his fiery hair.

"I don't want no home!" he flared. "I'm here to help Tom out of his trouble, and for nothin' else! He's my pardner, miss. Say, what was it Tom done—and what is it you're mad at him about?"

He watched her closely. She frowned and looked away, at nothing. There came a little period of silence that was an age to the lad, and still Althea said nothing.

"Tell me!" he urged.

She turned her eyes upon him again. There was more of sadness than of anger

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in them when she told him, as simply as she could, this:

"Tom Harrell came here with his father a good many years ago. These two were the last of an aristocratic—that is, a Kentucky family that had been on one side of a little war for a long, long time. Both Tom and his father were always proud, and they always told the truth; they were—er, very brilliant, but they were a little too easy to get mad.

"Tom's father bought a great, big cotton farm near here, and he didn't have quite enough money to start it; so he borrowed some money from old Eben Warren, who was the richest man, and the stingiest, anywhere around here. The Harrell farm had lots of bad luck, and Eben Warren gobbled it up. It was Mr. Harrell's first failure, and he died not long afterward.

"That was nine years ago," she went on, "when Tom wasn't much older than you. Tom was out of school only one week; and when he went back he wrote on the blackboard during his grammar lesson—

Some day I will kill Eben Warren.

"He analyzed the sentence—that is, he sort of explained it—to the school, and the teacher was somehow afraid to try to stop him. Nobody ever forgot it. But as Tom got older, it seemed to me he had no thought of killing Eben Warren. And yet people would point to him as he went along the streets, and whisper to one another—'Some day he'll kill Eben Warren.' When Tom heard about that, he'd laugh and say he was too much interested in decent things to think of such carrion as Warren.

"And I was sure that he was. He went through the schools here and carried off the highest honors, though he had to work evenings and Saturdays to pay for it. Many of us expected big things of him. My father used to hold him up as an example for other boys. Then Tom went off to a medical school, and he finished there in the shortest time possible. He came back, and had great success.

"Then he shot Eben Warren. I was very much surprised, and many others here were surprised, too. I could have forgiven him for thrashing Warren, old man that he was; but I couldn't forgive him for such—such cold-blooded killing. And he robbed Warren, too, like any cheap thief!"

Miss Shortridge was now talking to herself more than to the boy. Her voice was that of the most disappointed of women. She continued:

"For nine years old Warren had been hearing people say that Tom would get him some time, and it wore upon him. He never would go to sleep without a rifle close by, or with a window open, or without every door locked. He had no family; but his secretary, his housekeeper, and his housekeeper's husband told us about it."

She stopped breathlessly, and Red's interested face broke into a smile that was not without a hint of triumph.

"How did they know it was Tom that done it?" he demanded.

"For one thing," Althea said queerly, "Tom admitted it."

"You—you mean he owned up to it—to murderin' a' old man?"

Althea's eyes were dim now.

"Yes," she said.

The boy got to his feet and wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his soiled and ragged blue shirt. One of his hands came down flat on the table so hard that the silverware and china jumped and tinkled.

"He never done it! I don't care if he does say he did! Tom couldn't ha' done it to save his life!" cried Red. In lower tones, he went on impressively, "I've seen Tom Harrell give half o' his last grub to a starvin' dawg, and the other half to a starvin' boy; and I'm the very boy, Miss Althy."

Althea Shortridge bent her head over the table and said nothing. A bright and eloquent tear splashed down upon the immaculate linen below her face. Red looked hard at her tinted brown hair for a few seconds. Somehow he felt frightened. He turned toward the doorway, and confronted Colonel Shortridge, who held his glasses in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"What's the uproar?" asked the colonel.

Red's choler slipped up to a hundred in the shade.

"I said Tom Harrell never killed no old man," he clipped, "and I'm right now ready to tackle hell with half a bucket o' water to prove it!"

In his hot enthusiasm he had fallen into the language of the river crooks. Colonel Shortridge frowned heavily.

"If he didn't," coolly said the colonel, "why did he admit it? And how did it happen that Mr. Warren's secretary, Mr.

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Ennersley, found Tom Harrell's revolver in a clump of jasmines on the Warren lawn?"

"Don't make no difference; Tom couldn't ha' done it, 'cause it ain't in him," declared the lad.

Without another word, he stole from the house.

A BROAD shaft of light shone through the open front doorway and across the veranda, and here the boy met a man whom he was not to forget, a man who had come to call on the Shortridges. This was Mr. Ennersley. He was a big fellow, black-haired, handsome enough, and he wore nose-glasses. Red bristled instinctively, and Ennersley stepped aside with a glance which seemed full of the fear of contamination.

When it comes to reading the characters of men by their countenances, it is better to risk the instinct of a child whose survival has depended upon its own wits, than the judgment of the average supreme court official. On sight, Red liked Harrell and condemned Ennersley, facts which are full of meaning. But the boy had seen and known Warren's secretary somewhere, some time, before; this he realized dimly as he went toward the jail. And most of the acquaintances of his past were river crooks, some of whom were very smart crooks, who often found good pickings in this good-natured and easy-going Southland.

At the jail Red was denied admittance until morning. So he trailed wearily to the outskirts of the town, where he found a barn with an unfastened door; he crept up-stairs, threw himself down on a pile of old cotton, and went to sleep while trying to reason out the why of the thing that was of such great moment to his big pal.

He slept like a boulder, awoke in better shape both mentally and physically, and resumed his reasoning without even a preliminary yawn. The matter of the revolver he could explain satisfactorily to himself. The real criminal had stolen it and placed it on the Warren premises for the purpose of throwing the blame toward Harrell, which, of course, was not hard to do. But why did Tom own up to the killing of Warren?

He thought of his promise to Tom. There was no decent way out of it certainly. She was to find a home for him, and he was to stay in it. Stay in it, and let Tom go clean to the devil—because, perhaps, the girl was soured on him. Followed another half-hour of deep thinking, in which he rehearsed in his unfailing memory every word of the story Althea had told him the evening before.

Red left the barn and went once more to the home of the Shortridges. He meant to keep his promise.

This time the boy went to the kitchen entrance, and a servant came in response to his staccato of raps. He asked for Miss Althea, and the servant disappeared. Three minutes later Tom's sweetheart stood with Red there on the stoop. Somehow she seemed glad to see him, he thought.

"You said you'd find a place for me to stay, Miss Althy," awkwardly.

"Yes. Father is willing for you to stay with us if you won't say any more bad words. He thinks you've got some spunk."

"Borned with it," nodded Red. He thought immediately of the man whom he had met on the veranda some ten hours previously. "That feller who was here last night, with specs on; does he belong here?"

She almost laughed.

"Oh, no!"

"He's a back-knifer," Red declared. "I sure wouldn't want to stay where he did."

The young woman's smile faded.

"That was Mr. Ennersley, Mr. Warren's secretary. He will have charge of the Warren properties until in the Autumn, when the heirs are to gather here to make a division of everything."

Boys are sometimes quicker than women to jump at conclusions.

"I'd a heap ruther think Ennersley killed old man Warren 'an to think Tom done it," suddenly said the lad.

Althea shook her head.

"But Tom himself admitted that he did it. Hadn't you better come in to breakfast?"

SHORTLY before noon of that day Red appeared at the jail and asked to see Tom Harrell. He now remembered where he had seen and known Warren's secretary—it had come to him all in a flash—and his heart was jumping like a trout on a string. The sheriff goodnaturedly granted his request, and he

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hastened down the limy corridor to the door of Harrell's cell.

"Tom!" he cried joyously. "Look!"

Harrell had been standing with his face to the window. He turned slowly, moodily, and saw his little pal at the door; and he saw that his little pal wore new clothing out and out, and that his fiery hair had been nicely combed by a person who really knew how.

Their hand-shake through the bars was a hearty one.

"Did Miss Althea do the fixing up, son?" the prisoner asked.

"Yeuh," grinned the boy. "She never pulled half o' my hair out, like them rescue women in Noo Orleens done. She never scoured half o' the hide off o' my face, neither. I know you'll tell me the truth, Tom, 'cause I'm your pardner: did you sure enough kill that old geezer?"

Harrell was in no hurry with his answer. He merely shook his head.

"I knowed it!" Red glanced quickly to either side of him, and went on in a voice that was little above a whisper: "But what made you own up it was you done it, Tom? Why couldn't you prove you was some'eres else when the killin' was pulled off? I knowed a feller on the river who could always prove he was some'eres else when he was 'cused o' anything."

Harrell frowned, as though the subject was extremely distasteful.

"An alibi? It's hard to make an alibi at a time of night when nine of every ten honest people are asleep. I couldn't do it." He paused for a moment, then went on: "The fact that everybody expected me to do for Eben Warren got hard on my nerves, son. Maybe you can't understand that, but—it did. The people meant no harm by mouthing it, but they did do harm, great harm. Then one morning the sheriff and two other men stepped into my office, and the sheriff said he was very sorry to have to put me under arrest.

" 'At last I've killed old Eben Warren!' I yelled. Little pal, I was mad clean to the bone. 'I hope this mouthing town will be satisfied now!' I said.

"I meant it for—er, sarcasm, son, if you know what that means. But everybody thought I'd simply owned up to it when I was mad. Don't you see? When I found I couldn't explain it away, I stopped trying, and began to think up plans for getting out of jail. I never had a chance to tell Althea how it was. She—well, she didn't come to the jail to see me, son. After eight nights of digging with my knife I removed two window-bars and escaped. You know the rest."

"I happen to know her daddy wouldn't let her come to the jail to see you!" said the redhead. "But it was them findin' your gun in a clump o' jasmines up at Warren's that fixed you to a finish, Tom. Now, Tom, you bend down close to me and listen. I got somethin' to tell you."

Harrell's countenance depicted surprise. He hadn't known of the finding of his revolver on the Warren premises. Nobody had told him about that; and one reason for it was that he had made himself unapproachable upon seeing that his protestations of innocence counted for nothing. He preferred, he said, to plead his own case before judge and jury.

Between the boy and Harrell there followed a conversation in whispers, in which the name Ennersley figured largely. When it was over, Red went back to the home of the Shortridges, and there he held a whispered conversation with Althea. Most of this latter talk centered on a certain plan, a plan which seemed to hold forth promise.

At the last of the little council, Althea kissed him, and he loved her for it. Even Old Gyp had never kissed him.

CAME a dark Summer night, and then another. The man whom Warrenton knew as W. K. Ennersley sat at a desk in the room that had served as a study and an office for the late Eben Warren. He did not wear nose-glasses now, and the grave, half-professional air that caused Warrenton to look up to him was nowhere about him. To get to the truth of the matter, W. K. Ennersley was more or less intoxicated. A bottle and a glass were on the desk within easy reach of his hand.

Peering above the ledge of an open window of this room, a pair of bright blue eyes under a shock of fiery hair took all this in. The lad had already unhooked the window-screen by means of a short length of wire. He slipped through the window and appeared before Ennersley so suddenly that Ennersley's face lost some of its color.

"Hello, 'Big Red,'" grinned the boy in friendly fashion.

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The secretary went paler, swallowed, and stared silently.

"Don't you know me, Big Red?" the small intruder went on. "Don't you remember me and Old Gyp down at Noo Orleens? You was with Pietro's swell gang, on the lower river-front; don't you remember? I see you've dyed your hair, Big Red. Ashamed of it? I ain't o' mine. It's fightin' hair."

Ennersley came to himself, and he was careful.

"You're mistaken in the man," he said in rather funny, drunken solemnity.

"Yeuh! I know I am—not. You always played heavy games, Big Red. You always had a keen eye for purty girls, too, and Miss Althy sure is one pinkereemus. You'll be likely to get her now, won't you?"

"You're mistaken in the man," Ennersley repeated.

The boy went on, very carefully, with the speech that had been picked out for him by several shrewd, grown-up minds. He used, of course, his own particular language:

"Not so's you'd notice it, I ain't mistaken. Well, I'm here to talk business, Big Red. I ain't no cheap scoot, and never was one, and I hold a lot o' trump cards. I got to have some money. I got to have three hundred dollars, and you got to give it to me. If you don't, I'll tell all I know. Three hundred dollars right now!"

The secretary became uneasy. He squirmed in his chair, and his eyes flashed dangerously. He was square with the New Orleans authorities, but . . .

"What is it you'll tell?" he demanded.

"Lots o' things," the visitor answered glibly. "The first thing, I reckon, will be about you stealin' a gun from a doctor's office."

"You mean *I* stole a gun from a doctor's office?" in mock surprise.

"Yeuh. Harrell's. You don't think this is the only time I was ever in Warrenton, do you? Me, I'm some snooper, I am. Yeuh. And I'll tell about you comin' back here to this house, and about you shootin' old man Warren, and about you robbin' his safe o' all the money he had, him bein' afraid o' banks goin' bunk.

"It was a nifty deal, sure, you comin' off up here with forged letters sayin' you was gilt-edge, and takin' charge o' Sunday-schools and prayer-meetin's. Do I get the three hundred, Big Red, or not?"

Big Red sat aghast. But he was defiant rather than beaten. His face began to work with something akin to rage; then he went to his feet and sprang upon the lad, his hands gripping his accuser's slender neck.

"I don't pay blackmailers," he gritted. "I kill them quicker than I'd kill a man for his money!"

Little Red was choking, but the plan worked in time. Two long arms shot in at the open window, and two revolvers covered the murderer and would-be murderer, and the voice of the sheriff came booming:

"Up with 'em, Big Red—quick! We've got the goods on you!"

Ennersley put up his hands. He knew that the sleepy-looking sheriff was a good deal like sleeping dynamite. The two officers crept through the window and ironed their man, after which the sheriff picked up a telephone receiver and called for the residence of Colonel Shortridge.

The boy, who was not badly hurt, slipped once more across the window-sill. He hastened toward the center of the town and the jail to tell young Dr. Tom Harrell.

The jailer admitted him without question, and he dashed down the corridor to break the great, glad news to his friend. But it was only a small distance from the home of the Shortridges to the county's prison, and the news had already been broken to Tom.

Standing before Harrell's barred door, clasping one of Tom's hands in both of hers, was a young woman whose hair was full of tints of auburn. Red saw and hung back, in some vague manner a trifle disappointed —and a little jealous too, maybe.

Then Tom Harrell caught sight of him, and Tom understood perfectly.

"Come here, son," he said smilingly to the redheaded boy. "I wouldn't take a billion times a billion dollars for you. You're my pal, you know; now aren't you? And you must be Miss Althea's, too; won't you?"

Red crept forward.

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RED'S EXAMPLE

by CLYDE B. HOUGH

Author of "The Call of the Jungle," "Two Calls in the Jungle," etc.

HE WAS a freak; nothing less. His name was on the Osborne Quarry Company's books as Daniel Jenkins. But no one except the timekeeper and the pay-clerk knew him as such. To all the quarry gang he was "Red"—had been since the day of his arrival.

The nickname was due to the color of his hair, which grew straight up out of a head that resembled, more than anything else, a huge coconut with the small end up. He had dull, gray eyes, like opals without fire. His face was flat—had a pushed-in look. His neck craned forward so that his face was well ahead of his body.

He was bent a little at the waist which made him look, always, as though he had been stooping over and was just in the act of straightening up. His shoulder-blades had something under them that pushed them out and gave him the appearance of a hunchback. He had enormous, horny hands that hung below his knees even when he stood erect.

All over his body there were great wads and knots of muscles, irregular, unsymmetrical. His shoulders, arms and chest were covered with coarse, red hair, long, thick and matted. His legs were short, undersized and very bowed.

Red's coming to the Osborne quarry was the end of a long tramping spell. His home had been somewhere in Maine. He had a sister whose husband struck her in the face two weeks after they were married. Red was in the room at the time and instantly his great, horny fist lashed out like the flash of an adder's tongue. It crashed against the side of the husband's head just above the ear. The skull was fractured.

For weeks Red's brother-in-law lay in a hospital and Red lay in jail expecting to stand trial for manslaughter. But in the end, the injured man pulled through and Red was set free.

Things at home were never the same after that. The family, even the sister whom Red had defended, either purposely or unconsciously, drew apart from him. They looked on him, or at least he felt that they looked on him, as a sort of ogre—something to be feared and kept at a distance. So it was that Red left his home in Maine and in a haphazard sort of way drifted westward.

Sometimes he worked, sometimes he bummed his meals and beat his way on freight trains till at last he arrived at Kansas City. Here he heard that men were wanted to work in a rock quarry just a few miles out of town. So he had gone to the Osborne quarry.

A few days after Red went to work at the quarry, some Austrians who were working the section next to him, set off a blast which threw a large piece of rock across the tram track that ran along the face of the sections. The Austrians, first two, and then four of them, tried to roll the rock off the track. They strained and grunted, stood back, chattering and gesticulating,

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then tugged and grunted some more; but they failed to budge the rock.

The rock on the track was between Red's section and the crusher. Therefore, he could get no cars to load his rock on, nor could he send out the one that was already loaded; and since he was paid according to the amount of rock he took out, that is, so much per cubic yard, the delay peeved Red not a little. He walked over to the chattering Austrians, brushed them aside with a sweep of his arm as though they had been so many stalks of wheat, set his shoulder against the rock, grasped the bottom edge and rolled it off the track.

The rock must have weighed near a thousand pounds. Several Americans saw the feat and they immediately decided, among themselves, that here was the man to put an end to "Bull" Dixon's reign.

Bull Dixon was both boss and bully of the quarry gang. The gang hated him because he was a better man physically and a worse one morally than the best or the worst of them and they wanted to see him whipped, deposed. They knew that the prodigious strength of Red would be a direct challenge to Bull, so they talked of Red's prowess when they were sure that Bull could hear them, although pretending that they thought he could not hear. Bull understood all this and knew that he must soon try conclusions with Red lest his prestige should suffer.

Now, be it understood that Bull did not mix his positions. On the job he was strictly the boss and all business. Off the job, he was no boss at all and all bully. If he wanted to pick a row with a man in order to demonstrate his physical superiority, it was his habit to insult, exasperate and egg on until the man himself should become belligerent, thus affording an excuse for attack.

These preliminaries were maneuvered in many different ways. In Red's case they were started at the sink where the men washed. This sink was nothing more than a long wooden trough with a number of faucets above it.

It was early morning, the men were crowded at the sink. Bull came hurrying into the wash-room and looked around for an empty place. There was none. His eye fell on the red head of his intended victim down at a faucet as the latter laved his face with cold water. The night before Bull had made up his mind to have it out with Red. Here was a chance to open the way. He crossed over and made as if he would crowd in and use Red's faucet.

"Here, you freak," said Bull, "give somebody else a chance."

Red did not answer. He merely looked up at the other in surprise. Bull laid a hold on Red's shoulder and swung him half-around. Deep down in Red's dull, gray eyes, smoldering fires glowed; his fist clenched, his arm tensed and bent ever so slightly at his side. The wads and knots of muscles on his shoulder and biceps bunched for action.

But Red thought of those weeks in jail, of the agony, suspense and expectation of trial for manslaughter. He had promised himself that he would think well of those things before striking another man. He kept his promise; the opalescent fires in his eyes died and the muscles relaxed, their energy unspent.

Bull did not know why Red's blow was held but he did know the value of landing the first blow in a fight, particularly if the fight was to be with such a man as Red. So he took the hesitation of the other as his opportunity and struck a terrific, crashing blow with all the weight of his powerful body behind it.

His ponderous fist landed square on the point of Red's chin. By all the laws of physical endurance, Red should have rolled his eyes, sagged at the knees, toppled over and stretched out, unconscious. However, he did none of these things. He staggered a little, regained his balance, turned to a faucet that some one had left in the excitement, and laved his bruised chin.

After the episode at the sink, Red naturally took his place among those dominated by Bull Dixon, and the quarry gang was disappointed. They had expected to see a whale of a fight and at the end to see Bull brought to his knees.

"Oh, well," said one of them, "it's always the way; some fellow that's got the strength to lick him has no nerve, and some fellow who has the nerve is too weak. Oh, Lord, when will somebody lick Bull Dixon?"

A COUPLE of weeks later the question was answered. There came to the quarry another man—Peter Krovrosky. We have all seen Peter K. There are thousands of him scattered about this broad land of ours. He is to

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be seen in any city where prize-fighting is allowed. No one can knock him out, but any one can win a decision over him—that is, any one who is careful; the careless ones sleep.

However, they are generally careful. Therefore, Peter never gets to the top. This particular Peter was tired of being a "ham and" fighter, so he had decided to go to work and chose the Osborne quarry as the site of his new endeavor.

Bull should have seen the signs, the marks of his profession, that were written on Peter's face and he should have been careful. But Bull was blinded by prolonged success. Never had a man come to the quarry whom he could not either cower with words, or beat down with his fist. So he began his preliminary tactics on Peter, but Peter cut the preliminaries short.

Bull was made to order for Peter and the fight was not a fight at all. It was a long drawn-out struggle and ended in the downfall of Bull Dixon.

Dixon could have "fired" Peter, but he was too much the politician to do that. His prestige as bully was gone and to discharge the man who had dethroned him would seriously impair his prestige as boss. So Peter remained at the quarry, but with all of his fighting proclivities, he was no bully. He did not prove his ability at the expense of the other. This is one of the few ethical principles that the professional fighter observes, and Peter had been too long a professional not to have absorbed it.

Meantime, Dixon brooded over his downfall and had much recourse to the bottle as a means of solace.

"What hurts the most," he told Dave Curran, his one remaining friend, "it's a dirty, greasy foreigner that done it."

ABOUT the time of Bull Dixon's defeat, there floated across the country rumors of war. The day came when the decision was to be made. It was known at the quarry that should the decision be for war, the whistle at the flour mill in Osborne would blow the affirmative.

All morning the men worked under suspense and listened intently. The appointed time drew near. Now it was three minutes, now two. Would the whistle blow, or would it remain silent? What a momentous decision awaited announcement. Silence meant peace and the whistle meant war. Hearts stood still and mothers throughout the land heard already in imagination, the wailing of their wounded sons.

The men at the quarry stood on their sections and leaned on their tools. Work was impossible. The actual minute arrived. There was a breathless, silent second, and then the long-drawn shriek of the whistle.

The fire again glowed in Red's eyes. This time it fairly flashed, it seemed so near the surface. He threw his rock sledge aside and started for the bunk-house.

"Where you goin'?" asked Bull. "What you goin' to do?"

"Where am I goin'? Me? I am goin' to war. I am goin' to fight the Germans."

"I see," said Bull, "a patriotic nut, huh? Want to give your life to your country. Wish you had two lives to give and all that bunk. Well, I'm tellin' the world, here's one Johnny that's goin' to keep his life for his own use."

Red did not answer. He had no time to answer. He hurried to the bunk-house, changed into his best suit, and took the wagon road for Kansas City. Red covered the five miles that separated him from a recruiting office in exactly one hour.

"Well, young man," said the doctor when Red had stated the nature of his business. "I think you have broken a record. You have answered your country's call before the call was sounded. All the same, yours is the sort of spirit that makes us glad we are Americans. Just step into the next room, strip down, and I'll examine you."

"Hey, hold on there," called the doctor when Red was half-way across the room. "Never mind undressing. It's no use. You've got the worst case of flat feet I ever saw. I couldn't pass you."

Red looked down at his feet. They slewed outward at an angle of sixty degrees each. His shoes were not "run over," they were "run in." Yes, Red was flat-footed. He was more than that. Where the average person has arches, he had lobes of flesh. But Red could not see how this made any difference.

"Aw, Doc," he protested, "my feet are all right—they're hard as nails. I walked most all the way from Maine out here."

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"I don't doubt it," answered the doctor. "But tramping is a very leisurely business, while marching with an army is a —— serious business. I'm sorry, young man, but I can't pass you. There's not a doctor in the service who would."

Red did not believe the first doctor, so he made the rounds of all the recruiting offices, and at each place he met with exactly the same obstacle. Never once was he allowed to get as far as the dressing-room. So in the end, crestfallen and dejected, he went back to the quarry and to pounding rock.

When the draft regulation had been passed, and the age limit set, Bull Dixon smiled for the first time in weeks.

"Just passed thirty-one," he chuckled, "so they don't get your little uncle to play backstop for cannon balls."

There were three men at the quarry who drew numbers low enough to put them in the first contingent. Peter Krovrosky was one of the three. Bull should have been glad for this, and at first he did appear to be.

But on the last night the drafted men had at the quarry, Bull seemed to see the fact of Peter's leaving from a new angle. By some curious tack of his whisky-soaked brain, he came to the conclusion that Peter's leaving with matters as they stood, his, Bull's, chance to redeem his prestige would be gone forever.

This view of the matter was all the more galling when Bull realized that he had been promising himself all along to turn the tables on Peter Krovrosky. He had but little time left—a matter of hours—in which to accomplish his purpose; and in trying to speed up his thinking process and reach a decision, he resorted often to his bottle of whisky.

That he could not whip Peter in fair combat, he knew. How then could he best his enemy and not incur the contempt of the men, or the penalty of the law?

The men were gathered on the grass in front of the bunk-house. Bull was sitting on his bunk, pondering his problem and dosing himself with whisky, when suddenly he heard some one call loudly—

"Let's drink to the safe return of Peter Krovrosky, the champion of Osborne quarry."

This proposal was acclaimed with cheers. It was indeed the red rag to Bull. He sprang from his bunk and ran toward the door. As he went, he drew from his pocket a long-bladed jack-knife; one of the kind that has a spring at the jaw and which when once opened can not be closed until the spring is pressed.

"Who's the champion?" Bull demanded, as he dashed through the door. "I'll show the champion," he cried, and rushed toward Peter.

By the last glow of twilight, Red saw the gleam of the knife in Bull's upraised hand.

Peter was not watching Bull. He had contemptuously turned his back. In fact, no one except Red seemed to be aware of the impending tragedy. One step more and the knife would descend.

There was no time to deliberate. There was time only for action. Red's short, undersized legs bent and he squatted like a great frog. He shot upward, his broad shoulders blocking the space between Bull and Peter. Even as he sprang, he reached for the descending arm; but he misjudged his distance, the knife was buried in his shoulder. Two great, red, hairy hands clamped Bull's shoulders at the base of his neck. There was an audible sound of grinding flesh, as Bull was bent swiftly backward and downward as one might bend a reed. Slowly, the hands crept up and around the throat and Bull lay quiet.

The next morning Bull scrambled out of his bunk stiffly and walked over to where Red lay. With visible effort, Bull bent his head and looked at Red curiously.

"What did you do it for, Red? Don't you know you might've been killed?" he asked not unkindly.

"Ain't he goin' to be a soldier? Ain't he goin' to fight the Germans?" Red questioned.

Bull thought this over for a while and then he said slowly—

"Well, I'll be ——"

Then he turned and walked through the door.

"YOU'LL do, Dixon," said the recruiting doctor. "You have one of the best physiques I've examined for a long time. But—these marks—what the devil has had you by the neck?"

"A better man than I am," said Bull, "the man that woke me up."

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The HIDDEN CABIN

A Complete Novelette by

KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON

Authors of "Before Marquette," "A Saga of Men," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE LABORATORY IN THE WILDERNESS

THE first thing Jimmie Dunn saw when he sat down to his desk that morning was a Canadian stamp sticking out invitingly from the middle of a stack of mail. Eagerly he dug down to the letter, for the king's picture on the upper right-hand corner of an envelope might mean anything—words from friends who were in charge of distant Hudson's Bay Company posts, brief but imagination-firing notes from quiet, far-traveled members of the Dominion's Geological Survey, or, best of all, news from Tom Gill and Jimmie Wells.

As Jimmie Dunn jerked out the letter he saw the address in Tom's blurred penciling, but before he could withdraw what he knew would be a curt scrawl his stenographer opened the door.

"Mrs. Rakow, Mrs. Nicholas Rakow, is here to see you, Mr. Dunn," she announced.

In the outer office he met her, and immediately there flashed over him that same mysterious, apparently causeless sense of depression he always experienced in her presence. Nothing he had ever learned of her life warranted such a sensation.

It had come, however, at their first meeting and had persisted through the acquaintanceship. Whenever he was with her Jimmie Dunn found himself wondering what knowledge of tragedy lay behind the eyes which told him nothing and yet all.

As always he strove vainly for the cause of this feeling. The woman's appearance was pleasing in every detail. She was not pretty, but classically beautiful, and she retained the firm flesh, clear skin, color and carriage of her youth. There was an aura of refinement, of complete cleanliness of spirit and view-point about her, and the impression of perfection was created instantly by the whole, not by a collection of details. One would know that Mrs. Rakow's life was well-ordered, sheltered, exposed only to the pleasant and finer things.

Yet combined with this definite and immediate conception was the equally compelling realization of tragedy. As Jimmie Dunn searched her eyes for an instant he knew, too, that it was no common sorrow, no ordinary problem, that generations of breeding were hiding behind her face. Its source and character were as elusive as the manner in which it was displayed. But its very elusiveness made it sympathy-compelling and when Jimmie stepped forward to greet her pity forced out every other consideration.

"This is surely a pleasure," he said as he took the hand she offered. "Come into the office where I have better chairs. What is the good news from Doctor Rakow?"

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"I had his usual weekly letter a few days ago," she answered as she preceded him into the inner office and he closed the door. "Of course, you know it is impossible for him to write more often when the railroad is fifty miles away."

"Once a week speaks wonders in that country," Jimmie added quickly. "A hundred miles of lake, river and portage is quite an effort."

"And he has never missed by more than a day," she continued with just a suggestion of pride in her voice.

"That is quite remarkable," said Jimmie. "But the doctor's retreat is equally remarkable as a place for uninterrupted scientific research. I can not imagine a better location for his laboratory."

"I am sure of that, and I know he is succeeding. He does not mention his work, but I can always tell from the tone of his letters."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Jimmie. "I sometimes feel that there is a great deal of selfishness in a few of us here in the city appropriating for our exclusive pleasure so large a tract of wonderful game country. But if we at the same time further scientific research through the efforts of Doctor Rakow our consciences are salved."

Mrs. Rakow, who had been leaning back in her chair, straightened as with sudden determination and said—

"Mr. Dunn, you are president of the corporation owning this game-preserve, are you not?"

"Technically, I suppose I am," Jimmie laughed. "To meet legal requirements it was necessary to form a company, though as a matter of fact there was nothing very formal in the arrangement between the half-dozen of us who have long been friends and are rather keen about big-game shooting and the out-of-doors."

"And Doctor Rakow was not originally of this group?"

It was half a question, though Jimmie knew she was aware that the doctor had not purchased an interest in the corporation until a year after it had been formed.

"No," he answered. "The doctor was introduced by one of the members and the proposition made that, if he advanced a somewhat larger share than each of the original six, he should be granted exclusive use of a small tract upon which he was to build a laboratory and conduct certain researches. We were agreeable, not only because we wished to add to our holdings and leasings so as to include a desirable bit of country to the north, but also because we liked Doctor Rakow from the first. Had we not, nothing could have induced us to embrace another member."

Mrs. Rakow did not appear to have heard the last sentence. She was looking past Jimmie and out of the window.

"When were you at the preserve last?" she asked suddenly.

"The latter part of the Winter I spent ten days there."

"Did you see Doctor Rakow?"

"No. His laboratory is ten miles from the club-house, the snow was getting soft, and, besides, we have all respected his desire for privacy. I understood that he was deep in some experiments and did not wish to be disturbed."

"When do you expect to go again?"

"I hoped to go up this month, but I do not see how I can get away until late in the Summer."

"There is no possibility of your going sooner?"

"None that I can see now."

Again she looked out of the window and for a long time she did not speak.

"The doctor was in the city recently, was he not?" asked Jimmie.

"Yes," she answered absently. "Two months ago."

Then she looked at him suddenly and the first impression of tragedy returned with startling force.

"Mr. Dunn," she asked, "have you ever seen this laboratory of the doctor's?"

"No, I have never been within two miles of it, nor have any of the other members."

"Has the man in charge of the preserve?"

"No. Tom Gill told me last Winter that he had never been near it. The men who erected the buildings were brought on from eastern Canada and returned after finishing their work. The doctor has a servant, I have been told, who cooks for him and brings in supplies."

"Yes," she answered absently, "a half-witted boy whom he has been caring for."

Then she straightened suddenly and with what was, to Jimmie, a disconcerting insistency, returned to her earlier question.

"The doctor, then, has never told you the nature of his researches?"

"He has never mentioned his work."

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MRS. RAKOW arose. The strained expression was gone from her eyes, the tenseness from her body. Jimmie felt, however, a queer sense of unfulfilled purpose in the interview. While he was still staring, puzzled, unable to base his impression upon anything she had said, yet certain that she had not said what she had come to say, Mrs. Rakow concluded her visit with the most conventional of words.

"It has been very kind of you to grant me so much of your time, Mr. Dunn," she said. "As you know, I called twice last week but you were out. I am so glad to find you in, for I am on my way to the train now. My mother, in the East, has been seriously ill and last night they wired for me. I am so glad to have found you in before my departure."

Jimmie stammered his sympathy and wishes for the mother's speedy recovery, for more than ever he was mystified by this woman. She had called three times see him, though she could have made an appointment over the telephone with ease. And now, though she had taken the time and the thought to look him up while on the way to her dying parent's bedside, she had not said or asked anything of definite significance.

She said good-by in the outer office and Jimmie returned to his room.

"Now what does all that mean?" he demanded of himself as he sat down at his desk. "All this effort and time, and for nothing, so far as I can see. I always did think Rakow a bit queer, especially to bury himself in the woods when he has a wife like that here in Chicago. But I guess anything's liable to happen with a man who has one of those southeastern European names."

He turned once more to his desk and for the first time since the interruption he thought of Tom Gill's letter. Again he picked up the envelope, but as he withdrew the familiar, scrawled pages, the door opened. Startled, he looked up to see Mrs. Rakow enter.

"I beg your pardon," she said as she closed the door, "but there is one thing more I must ask, and the train goes soon."

She stood there looking at him, hesitating, trembling slightly, her eyes wide now with a terror that was not veiled. Jimmie Dunn, too surprised to rise, only stared. Again he was struck with the certainty that the woman bore the burden of some tragedy.

"I want to ask you," she said at last, "to do something for me."

"Gladly," he replied quickly.

"I want you," she continued, "to go to Doctor Rakow's laboratory the next time you are on the preserve. If you can, do not let him know it. I have heard that you are a wonderful woodsman, Mr. Dunn. You could do it, in the night perhaps."

"But," he protested, "there was the agreement."

"Ignore it!" she commanded, her voice steady, her hesitation gone for the first time. "Go to his place, get inside, see what he is doing. You must. I would not do my duty if I did not tell you this."

She opened the door and stepped out so quickly the astounded Jimmie could only stare. For a moment he sat there. Then he leaped to his feet and ran out into the hall. It was empty. An elevator was just descending.

JIMMIE DUNN was forty-seven and a bachelor. He had left college at the end of his second year to join a Barren Grounds exploring party in Canada and for twelve years had remained there practically all the time, almost never seeing a white woman.

Business and sport had occupied him since the return from his last expedition fifteen years before when, after being held prisoner for two years by a band of renegade Chippewyans, he was rescued by Marshall Wells, companion on all his exploring journeys, and Tom Gill, Canadian woodsman, who always had been with them.

Business and sport it was, and James Dunn Wells, Jimmie Junior, or, as Tom Gill had named him, "Jimmie Lad." Jimmie Lad was born just before his father started on his rescue journey, when he had risked everything to save his old friend, and it was because of that boy baby back there in the Southland, and because of the father's sacrifice, that Jimmie had abandoned the far North.

There was nothing else to explore, for they had seen practically all the Barren Grounds that extend across the north end of the continent, all except one oasis in the great, white desert, a fabled district in which timber grew and game was abundant

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the year 'round, and which was inhabited by a small band of Indians who had never seen white men.

"We'll leave that for Little Jimmie," Jimmie Dunn had declared when their escape from the Indians and from the equally dangerous Winter on the Barren Grounds was assured. "It's the last unexplored spot on the continent, and we'll keep it for him."

The enthusiastic exclamation had become a pledge and when Jimme Lad's mother died a few years later Jimmie Dunn incorporated himself as co-parent with Marshall Wells.

"We've shared the last few ounces of caribou meat, and we can share Jimmie Lad," Jimmie Dunn had said. "Besides, I'll never have any of my own. The North made me woman-shy."

Despite this admission, or boast, Jimmie Dunn, like most bachelors, believed he understood women. As he walked back to his office, puzzling over the reappearance of Mrs. Rakow and her request, or demand, that he pry into the doctor's affairs, his face suddenly lighted with understanding.

"Jealous, of course!" he exclaimed as he closed the door. "And probably grounds for it, too. Here the doctor takes an unheard-of method to obtain privacy for research work and won't let any one near his place in the bush. So she asks me, as president of the preserve corporation, to look into it, knowing we'd kick the doctor out if she is right."

He sat down at his desk and for the third time picked up Tom Gill's letter. He was more than usually interested in Tom's note for it was at his suggestion that Jimmie Lad had been sent North to spend the Summer with the woodsman.

"Look here, Marsh!" Jimmie Dunn had exclaimed one night the previous Winter, "you know that when Jimmie Lad is twenty-one we three, and Tom, are going north to find that oasis. It's to be our farewell to the North and Jimmie Lad's introduction to the real thing. We've saved the oasis in the Barren Grounds for him. Not a soul has heard of it except we three. But we can't take him up there without experience. He's got to know the bush."

"He has spent the last four Summers in northern Wisconsin in the best boys' camp I could find," defended Marshall.

"Huh!" snorted Jimmie Dunn in complete disgust. "And you'd train him to be a salt-water sailor by letting him sail a toy ship in a bathtub. It amounts to the same thing. I know those boys' camps."

"He can swim and paddle and shoot, and two Winter vacations have taught him the use of snow-shoes," declared Marshall.

"Yes, he can do all that with twenty other boys and half as many college instructors looking on. I tell you, Marsh, he's got to get out on his own, see something of the real thing, buck up against a stiff proposition or two. Now look here! Do you know what we are going to do with Jimmie Lad this Summer? I'll tell you. We're going to send him up to Tom Gill, and I'm going to write Tom and tell him what I want done. No coddling goes."

Jimmie Dunn had spoken defiantly, anticipating opposition, but Marshall Wells, his eyes glowing with his own memories of the "real thing" as few men have known it, answered him quietly:

"All right, Jimmie, but you'll have to look after it. It is just the thing, for I must leave for Europe in April. We're going after new business in Russia, and it will be Fall before I return."

CONSEQUENTLY it was with the anxiety of a fond parent that Jimmie Dunn opened Tom Gill's letter to learn how things were going with Jimmie Lad up on the preserve. It would be the first news since the boy had left three weeks before and Jimmie Dunn anticipated a good laugh or two, for he knew there would be no pampering in Tom's schooling. But the letter began:

DEAR JIMMIE:

Hurry up here and get the kid out. I've tried to send him but he won't go. Two days ago some one took a shot at us. Hit the canoe right behind Jimmie Lad. I think it's a poacher and have a good idea who it is, but Jimmie Lad says poaching is only a blind and that something mysterious is going on and he can prove it. He almost makes me believe it only I know such things don't happen in the bush and that he's been reading too many stories about boy detectives and all that foolishness.

But hurry up, for I don't want him shot and I've got to get at the bottom of this business. No one can take a pot-shot at me and have a chance to do it again, but I don't want to take chances with Jimmie Lad. I tried to pen him up in the clubhouse but he got loose and now I don't dare go off after this fellow because the minute I do he'll be out looking for clues as he calls them. So come up and get him quick. Your friend,

TOM GILL.

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P. S.—Jimmie Lad just told me he's been snooping around Rakow's place and he says it's the seat of the trouble and there's lots of clues there. Of course I know he's only a sixteen-year-old kid, but his keeping on talking about a mystery has got me going. There was a time when I never believed anything, especially in the bush, unless I saw it. But after those Indians captured you and that medicine-man made them believe you was turning the chief's son white and Marshall Wells saw it and I didn't, I'm not so sure of myself. Strange things can happen and maybe this is one of them. Anyhow, hurry up.

Jimmie Dunn leaped from his chair, grabbed his hat and rushed into the outer office.

"Open all those letters," he cried to his stenographer as he passed through to the corridor. "Tell them I am out of the city, can't be reached, may not be back for a month."

He caught an elevator, then a taxi, and drove to his rooms. Many quick trips to the preserve for a few days in the wilderness had given him an exact knowledge of railroad time-tables and he knew a train would leave in two hours, one that would drop him at the point nearest the club-house by the next noon. A day and a half more in a canoe and he would be with Tom and Jimmie Lad.

"Shooting at Jimmie Lad!" was his sole thought until he had finished packing a bag.

His own responsibility in the matter of sending the boy to the wilderness and his great affection for him brought only a realization of the possibilities of the situation. He and Marshall Wells had often been confronted by hazardous situations in the far North and had met them calmly and adequately. Now a vague fear, suspense, uncertainty, combined with his love for the boy, brought nothing less than panic.

"Shooting at Jimmie Lad!" he repeated over and over.

Then, as he was about to close the bag, he straightened suddenly.

"Mrs. Rakow!" he exclaimed, thinking of her for the first time since reading Tom's letter. "Could she have been suggesting anything criminal in the doctor's operations? If that Bulgarian, or whatever he is, ever harms a hair of Jimmie Lad!"

The parting sentence of Mrs. Rakow recurred to him—

"I would not be doing my duty if I did not tell you this."

The sentence had meant nothing to him at the time but now it flashed forth with any number of sinister interpretations. These brought the need of immediate action and he dashed out of the door, down to the waiting taxi and off to the train.

In the two days and a half which elapsed before he reached the game-preserve Jimmie Dunn had plenty of time to become his normal, level-headed self and to go over the entire situation. As he analyzed it he realized that he had only one known fact and several uncertain possibilities to deal with. First, some one had taken a shot at Tom Gill and Jimmie Lad when they were in a canoe. Tom's belief that it was a poacher sounded all right. It was Tom's duty to keep poachers off the preserve.

As for Jimmie Lad's opinions, they were those of a sixteen-year-old boy, probably without foundation. But, and this point gave Jimmie Dunn his greatest uneasiness, they seemed to dovetail with the strange reappearance of Mrs. Rakow and her insistence that the doctor's hidden laboratory be searched.

He tried to arrive at a sane and plausible reason for the scientist hiding himself in the wilderness to cover up contraband operations but could not imagine anything that required such secrecy or isolation. From what he had seen of Doctor Rakow he believed the man was wrapped up entirely in research work and not to be interested in anything else.

Jimmie Dunn reverted, too, to his theory that Mrs. Rakow's request was actuated by jealousy or jealous fears, but each time he arrived at the conclusion that Rakow could have no connection with what was happening he was upset again by the credit hard-headed Tom Gill was inclined to give to Jimmie Lad's stories and by the unaccountable impression of hidden tragedy and mystery when he was in Mrs. Rakow's presence.

As he neared the club-house late in the afternoon of the third day he became more anxious to get at the bottom of the mystery to assure himself of the boy's safety. He had been paddled out by a man at the railroad station but two miles away he turned him back.

"There's a trail from this lake around the next one and I can walk all the way," he said. "No use in your packing your canoe across another portage and back."

He paid the man and hurried into the

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forest, his pack on his back. The path took him on a circle over higher ground, then swung west until it struck the portage leading to the last lake, the one on which the club-house stood. As he struck the portage, which was only half a mile long, his senses became alert. In a moment he could see smoke from the club-house chimney, could hear sounds of some one at the place.

"Halt!" cried a voice from some thick brush beside the trail.

He whirled toward it, his hands raised.

There was a crashing of brush and a shrill yell.

"Uncle Jimmie! Uncle Jimmie!"

A boy, thrusting aside the bushes with a rifle, his face beaming, his eyes bright with excitement and joy, ran toward him.

"Gee, I'm glad you came!" he exclaimed. "Tom made me promise to stay at the club-house until he got back and ever since yesterday I knew I ought to go."

"Where is Tom?" asked Jimmie Dunn after he had grasped the youngster's shoulders and shaken him roughly to hide his emotion.

"That's it! Where is he? He left day before yesterday morning to get that fellow who took a shot at us and he ain't back yet."

He winked his eyes vigorously and then declared fiercely:

"That skunk's got Tom, Uncle Jimmie. Tom's dead or he'd be back by now."

CHAPTER II

THE HIDDEN CABIN

FOR a moment Jimmie Dunn's relief in finding the boy safe and well was too great to permit a realization of the possible fate of his old friend, of the man who more than once had risked everything for him in the Barren Grounds. Since he had received Tom's letter his fear had been all for Jimmie Lad. The woodsman, he felt certain, was always ready for any emergency.

"But Tom can take care of himself anywhere," he objected as he looked at the boy.

"Nobody can take care of himself when some one's liable to take a shot at him anywhere in the bush!" retorted Jimmie Lad. "The same fellow took a shot at us when we never expected it, and he hit the canoe less than two feet behind my back. What's to prevent him shooting at Tom the same way and getting him?"

"And Tom left here two days ago in the morning?"

"Yes, and he said he'd be back last night at the latest. I tell you, Uncle Jimmie, we've got to go find him."

"We will, lad!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn.

He hid his sudden admiration for the boy, the glow of affection increased by the realization that here was a reincarnation of the quiet purpose and dependability of his old comrade in danger, Marshall Wells, by picking up his pack and saying:

"We'll find him, Jimmie Lad. Come on to the club-house. We'll need something to eat first and while we're cooking a meal you can tell me what's happened since you came."

He strode off quickly, the youngster at his side. Jimmie Wells, in his wool shirt, khaki trousers and shoepacks, walked swiftly and easily at his side. From the corner of his eye the man noted the quick stride of the long legs, the soft, sure manner in which the feet sought out the even places in the rough trail, the natural way in which the rifle seemed to rest so lightly along the left forearm.

The boy was a little tall for his age, perhaps, a little long and gangling for his weight. There was a suggestion in his figure of the youth who has grown too quickly, whose body has outdistanced the strength necessary to swing the long arms and legs effectively.

But this conception, natural when he was in repose, was dispelled when he began to move. Instantly there was a revelation of strength and competence unusual in a youngster just past his sixteenth birthday. Jimmie Dunn, scornful of boys' camps, recognized it only as a heritage from his explorer-father.

Jimmie Lad's face had been alight with eagerness and joy when he had burst from the brush with his glad cry of welcome. It had stiffened in an expression half comical because it was half tragic when he had spoken of the possible fate of Tom Gill.

But now, as he hurried on, there was a certain inscrutability in the eyes and expression. His gaze swung from side to side and ahead but without that boyish intentness of the vacant-lot Indian scout. His watchfulness and caution were as natural

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as his loose, easy stride, and again Jimmie Dunn found himself forgetting Tom Gill in his delighted appraisal of all the qualities he had hoped for in the boy.

"Where did this fellow take a shot at you?" he asked when they were busy over the stove in the club-house kitchen.

"That was ten days ago, a couple of weeks or so after I came," was the reply. "Tom and I had been up in the northwest corner of the preserve, just making a patrol and not expecting to find anything much. Tom said no one would be shooting meat this time of year, unless it was a little bit for their own use. But we got a whiff of something dead on Clear-Water-Over-Sand River and turned ashore. A moose had been killed and all the meat taken.

"There weren't any signs we could find out anything by and we started on. Just as we got into the canoe we heard a shot downstream. We paddled along quiet, close to the shore where the wild rice and old reeds are high, but we couldn't hear anything or see anything.

"Then, just as we rounded a bend, a bullet hit the canoe right behind me. Went right through both sides, just above the water. I'll show it to you after we eat. The next second we heard the shot. It was so close we didn't have time to move before we heard it."

"What did you do then?"

"Tom just began to paddle and swear under his breath. 'Dig in,' he told me, and the next minute we were around the bend. 'Let's go get him,' I said, but Tom said, 'Not on your life, young fellow. This is no place for you.' He just kept on paddling and we came straight home.

"Tom was awful mad about it and the next morning he went off by himself early and was gone for two days, but he didn't find out anything."

"What did you do while he was gone?" asked Jimmie Dunn casually.

"Well, I'll tell you, Uncle Jimmie," the boy burst forth frankly, "Tom, he doesn't—he hasn't—well, he doesn't think enough, someway. Not about some things."

"You mean he hasn't much imagination?"

"Yes, that's it. He knows all about the bush, and he can see everything that happens, but a track is just a track to him. You know, Uncle Jimmie, Tom doesn't read much."

Jimmie Dunn repressed a smile with difficulty and hurriedly bent over the frying-pan to turn the bacon.

"Few men in the bush do read much," he answered. "But what has reading to do with his seeing tracks?"

"Well, it's this way. He'll see a track on a portage and say, 'Some one's been across here since the last rain.' And that is all he thinks about it. Now, if Tom had read more books he'd begin to figure whether that was a tall man or a short one, and where he had come from and where he was going and if he was in a hurry or just poking along and if he was afraid some one was following him and if he had a beard or was shaved."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn. "You don't mean you can tell all that from a footprint in the mud?"

"Sure, if you think about it enough and look for everything that leaves a clue."

"Tom doesn't believe in clues, eh?"

"No. He says when he sees a thing he knows it's so and guessing don't do any good."

"But how about what you did when Tom was gone those two days?"

"I went up near Rakow's place."

He did not say it defiantly and yet there was no apology in his tone or manner.

"That's against the rules of the preserve," Jimmie Dunn said severely. "You should not have done that, boy. When this affair was organized your father and I took out a share for you and you are as much a member as any of the rest of us, and as amenable to the rules."

"Yes, I know, but the doctor never knew it," replied the boy, wholly unabashed, "and I was only hiding on the lake more than a mile from his place, just watching. Besides, I had to go because Tom wouldn't."

"Had to go?"

"Yes," and the boy's voice sank to a wholly unnecessary whisper as he glanced at the window and door. "I tell you, Uncle Jimmie, there's something funny going on up there."

"TOM may not read enough, but you have been reading too much," remarked Jimmie Dunn at this.

"No, it isn't that. You know that fellow who works for the doctor, hauls his supplies and goes out for the mail and cooks and does the rest of the work. He's only half-witted and sometimes he talks a

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lot and sometimes he just mumbles to himself. Well, he was here one day on his way out for the mail and I was sitting on the dock when he paddled up. He didn't seem to see me and he was talking to himself and he was saying over and over, 'Darn those pesky kids. Darn those pesky kids.'

"I didn't think anything about it then but a few days ago when we were camped three miles south of the doctor's and Tom was making an all-day trip overland to look up the line—he said it was too much for me in one day—I went back through the brush toward Rakow's place.

"I didn't start out for there, Uncle Jimmie. Honest. I never thought about him at all when I started. I was just crossing back over a ridge and through a swamp to the next lake north. It wasn't a very big lake, and I walked around it to climb a high hill on the other side. From there I could see another little lake in the middle of the big swamp.

"It looked shallow and there were lots of water-lilies in it, but I couldn't see a moose feeding. I thought that was strange and so I went over to see if there was any fresh sign on the shore. I figured if there was any reason the moose weren't thick there we ought to know it because that is just the kind of a lake Tom says they like this time of year."

He stopped as if for approval of such thoughtfulness, but Jimmie Dunn did not comment because he was too busy hiding his amazement that the boy could so easily traverse the thick spruce swamp.

"Do you know, Uncle Jimmie," the youth continued, "there wasn't a sign of a moose around that lake. The water-lilies were thick but none of them had been pulled up. Some lakes are all cleaned out by this time. There were lots of runways, only they were old and there wasn't what you would call a real fresh track."

"Is that what you would call a clue?"

The boy flushed slightly.

"A sort of one," he replied with some spirit. "If it was a good place for moose and moose had been there last year, but there weren't any this year, something was the reason, wasn't it? Something was scaring them away. At first I thought, of course, they'd been killed off, and I started around the shore looking to see if there were any bones. I was climbing through a bunch of cedar windfalls when I heard a boy yell across the lake.

"A boy!" repeated Jimmie Dunn in amazement.

"Well, it was as near a boy's yell, the kind when he's playing, as I ever heard. I was back from the water but I went right out to the edge and looked across the lake. I couldn't see a thing, so I kept on going and after a while I came to a trail in the swamp. It wasn't a game runway but a trail people had been using and it led to a spring close to the lake.

"I followed it back a ways, thinking maybe I'd see the kid who yelled. It kept straight north and then there was one of those breaks in the swamp, just open muskeg, you know, and across that, just inside the spruce on the other side, was a log house.

"Of course I hid right away and it was a good thing I did, because I saw some one moving back near the cabin. And, Uncle Jimmie, it was Doctor Rakow."

"Doctor Rakow! Then you were at his place?"

"Yep! That is, I was that close to it, about an eighth of a mile. I didn't go any closer but when he went inside I sneaked back through the swamp and hurried around to the other lake and over to camp."

"Then you never intended to go near the doctor's place?"

"Not that time, but I went back the next day."

"Went back!"

"Of course. I told Tom all I'd seen when he got back that night. He wouldn't take any stock in it, and said it was none of his business anyhow as he wasn't supposed to patrol that close to the doctor's place."

"But this boy you heard?" asked Jimmie Dunn incredulously.

"That's just it!" was the excited reply. "Tom said it was that half-witted man who works for the doctor because his voice is like a boy's anyhow. That might have been so, but there was something else. Tom said he didn't believe me anyhow."

"Why not?"

"He said the doctor's place is on the north side of a bay of a big lake farther north and on high ground, not in a swamp. He says there isn't any cabin where I told him I saw one."

Jimmie Dunn looked at the boy for a

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moment. He had no doubt whatever of the youngster's veracity and this unknown, hidden cabin in the swamp, with Doctor Rakow in it, aroused all the vague suspicions which had filled his mind on his way north from Chicago.

"Tom wouldn't go to see, so when he was gone the next day I went back again," Jimmie Lad continued. "I got as far as the trail from the little lake to the cabin and what do you think I saw on it?"

Jimmie Dunn shook his head.

"It wasn't very clear, and only half of it showed, but I'm sure, Uncle Jimmie, it was the print of a boy's foot, a boy wearing ordinary shoes. It was there in the mud in a wet spot, just the front of the foot. The heel had rested on a root. I started along toward the cabin looking for more, but I happened to look up and see the half-witted fellow coming, so I sneaked into the brush and went back to camp."

Jimmie Dunn did not speak when the boy paused. If what had just been told were true there were grounds for his suspicions.

"Uncle Jimmie!" the youngster exclaimed. "We've got to get inside his place when he doesn't know it, and find out what is going on there."

The words were the same Mrs. Rakow had used and because they were identical the effect of them was electrical upon Jimmie Dunn. They brought back with renewed force all the disquieting suspicions that had been aroused by the interview with the doctor's wife, and suddenly crystallized his formless plans into a determination to investigate the mysterious laboratory in the wilderness and to satisfy himself at once whether scientific research were being used as a cloak for illicit operations.

"I tell you," the boy broke in upon his thoughts; "that doctor is a kidnaper. That is why he has this place up here. He's kidnaped some one down in the States, maybe in Chicago. He's the leader of a gang of crooks who do the stealing while he furnishes the brains and works the rich parents for money.

"Don't you see? He could have these boys, and maybe girls, stolen in New York or Chicago, or any city, and then spirit them away on a train and off into the woods. He could take them out of Chicago on a lake boat. Box them up and ship them as dry goods or machinery or something and land them on the north shore of Lake Superior and then get them up here in canoes, traveling only at night. He'd meet his gang here and send out letters they were to mail to the fathers and mothers, and doing it that way there'd never be a chance of his getting caught."

JIMMIE DUNN, his own mind busy, had scarcely heard the boy's excited sketch of the possibilities of the doctor's activities. He was piecing together what he had known before, what he had suspected, and what Jimmie Lad had told him.

"But," he objected suddenly, "what has all this to do with some one taking a shot at you and Tom and Tom's disappearance?"

"Don't you see? The doctor isn't the only one in the gang. Some of the men who do the kidnaping and getting the children up here have to come to him for orders. He's the leader of the gang, the one who furnishes the brains, and he controls every move of every one of his men. They sneak up here and get orders who to kidnap and how to do it, and it's one of them we ran into that day."

"But a moose had been killed."

"Sure. That's part of his game. He wants Tom and you and all the others to believe some one is poaching so you'll be so busy hunting them you'll never suspect him, and if you or Tom or any one should see one of his men you'll think it is the one who is poaching. It's only a blind, Uncle Jimmie, and now Tom's gone and run into one of these men and he's either been killed or he's in the doctor's power. That's why I guarded the trail today. If they got Tom they might come around here."

Fantastic as the story was, so filled with typical products of a boy's imagination, there still remained certain facts that convinced Jimmie Dunn of the seriousness of the situation, chief of which was the absence of Tom Gill. They had finished their meal and Jimmie Dunn suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Jimmie Lad," he said, "I've got to get out and find traces of Tom."

The boy's face fell and the man stiffened to meet the appeal in the eyes that held his.

"I'd take you, lad, but I could never forgive myself, nor could your father, if anything happened to you. If things are

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as you suspect it's a man's job to get to the bottom of it, and in any event Tom must be found. Be a sport, now, and stay here while I'm gone. If I'm not back in two days, get out to the railroad. You know the way. I'll leave the addresses of other members of the club. You can wire them, and the police, too, and when they come tell them all that you've told me."

"But," protested Jimmie Lad as he made an effort to speak steadily, "I'll be careful, Uncle Jimmie, and I can shoot, and you'll need me to help paddle."

The older man had determined that no pleading would influence him and he turned away to avoid the youngster's eyes. As he strode across the room he stopped suddenly before a window.

"Here's Tom now!" he exclaimed. "Walking along the shore!"

They were both out of the door in an instant and running down to the lake.

"He's on foot!" gasped Jimmie Lad as he caught up with Jimmie Dunn. "He went away in a canoe."

Tom Gill, after a glance toward them, continued to plod slowly along the sand at the water's edge. When the two rushed up to him he lifted a haggard face which lighted when he saw Jimmie Dunn.

"What happened, Tom?" demanded the latter.

The woodsman's eyes fell and then he said sheepishly:

"I hate to say it, but that fellow who took a shot at us got the best of me, got the drop, Jimmie Lad would say, and he turned me loose beyond the northeast corner of the preserve without a canoe or a gun or a bite to eat. I've been two days getting back and I'm near dead for a square meal."

"Then it was the kidnapers!" cried the boy excitedly.

"Kidnapers nothing!" growled the woodsman as he went on toward the club-house. "He's a fellow I used to know farther east, and he's nothing but a plain poacher, killing meat for the gold-mine they started up on White Otter Lake last Fall."

"Then he has no connection with Doctor Rakow?" asked Jimmie Dunn quickly.

"Of course not. What's a man like the doctor want to be messing with those kind of pennies for when he's got dollars to put into this preserve. But," and he stopped suddenly and turned to face Jimmie Dunn, "he says he's not the only one in the poaching gang and he told me how to get the rest of them tomorrow."

CHAPTER III

JIMMIE LAD'S PROOF

TOM GILL would not talk until his feeling of emptiness had been somewhat relieved. He thrust the willing Jimmies aside, set water to boil for tea, opened two cans of soup and turned them into a frying-pan. When the meal was hot, he began slowly to eat soup and drink black tea.

Jimmie Dunn, often the victim of hunger on the Barren Grounds, accepted the wisdom of the course and waited until the hot liquids had revived his friend. Jimmie Lad, who never had missed a meal by more than three hours, was a trifle hurt by the woodsman's gruff refusal to be tempted by whitefish, potatoes and bannock, which the boy was eager to prepare.

At last, when the dulness was gone from his eyes, the deeper lines from his face, and his pipe was lighted, Tom Gill looked at the others with his habitual slow grin.

"That fellow certainly got the drop on me, Jimmie Lad," he said with a wink for Jimmie Dunn. "I went back to Clear-Water-Over-Sand River to try and pick up some sign of him, and, when I landed where he took a shot at us to see what he had been killing that day, he took a shot at me from some brush and makes me lay my gun down."

"If I had been with you, like I wanted to, that never would have happened," broke in Jimmie Lad. "We would have separated and one of us come up from behind, and then we'd have had the drop."

"You mean he'd have dropped one of us," said Tom. "No, lad, that was no place for a young fool, or an old one either. I never thought any one could get the best of me in the bush, but this fellow did. He makes me lay my gun down and hold up my hands, and then he steps out.

" 'If it ain't Ed Benton,' I says. 'I thought you went out to British Columbia long ago.'

" 'That's what I let some folks believe,' he says, 'but now it's going to be true, at least so far as my going somewhere is concerned.'

" 'You'll have to mooch pretty fast or else

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tie me to a white pine with a skiddin' chain,' I tells him. 'I've been looking for you for some time, Ed, though I didn't know you was the man.'

" 'I'm only one of them,' he says, and he begins to cuss.

" 'You mean the foreman over at the White Otter Lake mine?' I asks him.

" 'Oh, he just buys the meat and don't ask questions,' says Ed. 'I've been bamboozled on this game, Tom, and there's no way for me to get even with the other fellow. If I was to tell you who it was you'd never believe it, and you couldn't prove it, nor could I. Now you're on to me, and besides, if you hadn't been, I was going to pull out anyhow. I'm through letting another fellow use me.'

" 'Who is this other fellow?' I asks him.

"He just cusses and says 'What's the use?' and then he tells me to walk down the river a way. We come to his canoe and he tells me to get into the bow. All afternoon we paddled, right up into the northeast corner of the preserve and about ten miles beyond. Then on the first portage on Loon River he lands me on the north side.

" 'Here's where you get out, Tom,' he says. 'I'm sorry to play such a trick on you, but you can get back to the club-house without getting too starved, and besides I've got to have time to get away. There's no use your looking for me because I'm not leaving a trail, and there's no use trying to find that other fellow, because you wouldn't believe it if you did find him.

" 'I'll take your rifle across the river and leave it under that rock where it will keep dry. The next time you come up this way you can get it. I'm sorry, Tom, but you can see I've got to get clear. I suppose you've kept checked up pretty well and know I've taken out thirty moose. Twenty-five dollars apiece straight, I was paid. That would mean more than a fine for me, and anyhow I don't feel like paying for another fellow's game. So long,' he says.

"I sat down on a windfall and he paddles across and unloads to make the portage. Just as he gets a pack on his back he sets it down and paddles back.

" 'Look here, Tom,' he says, 'I'd never squeal on a pardner so long as he played square with me. But I don't look at this fellow like he was a pardner, and he's played me for a fool and I'm goin' to tell you one thing. If you can make anything out of it, all right.'

"He waited a minute, thinking, and then he says, 'Mind that old prospector's shack on Two Island Lake? Well, Friday morning you be there. If you can get there early you'll find some money under a pole in the floor in a baking-powder can. That's what I was to leave, a third. And early Friday morning, which is the twenty-fifth, some one will come for that money. He's the one you want.' "

"Rakow!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn and Jimmie Lad together.

"Rakow nothing!" snorted Tom Gill. "How much did Rakow put into this preserve? Some thousands, wasn't it? And how much does a third of thirty moose at twenty-five dollars a piece figure to? Two hundred and fifty dollars, isn't it? What's that to the doctor, and why else would he mix up with a man like Ed Benton?"

"That's all a blind!" exclaimed Jimmie Lad excitedly. "Don't you see? He's been kidnaping children and bringing them into the preserve to hide them, and he gets this Benton to shoot moose to keep you busy and never think about what he's doing. And he has to take part of that money to keep Benton from suspecting him. He figures that if you see signs of strangers in the preserve you'll think it's the poachers. This Benton did most all his work in the northeast corner and the doctor's place is in the northwest corner."

"That's because the northeast corner is closest to the White Otter Lake mine, where he sells the meat," interrupted Tom. "No, Jimmie Lad, this Ed Benton is a slick one, and all this talk about his being a catspaw for some one else and his giving up a third of the money is just a play to get me off the track while he gets away.

"He made seven hundred and fifty dollars this last year according to his own story, and perhaps more than a thousand according to the truth, and now he's getting out of the country. It took me more than two days to walk home through the brush, and he could get to the railroad the night I left him. I could have walked north to the C. P. R. and there was a bare chance I could have got there in time to head him off by wiring the police.

"He knew that, and he told me this story about the money being hid in the shack on

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Two Island Lake to make me come back here so's I could watch the place on Friday, which is tomorrow. You could see he just made it up as he was leaving. But I know Ed Benton and I'm not going to bite."

"You don't believe there is any grounds for connecting Rakow with this, or with anything else, do you, Tom?" asked Jimmie Dunn seriously.

"Jimmie Lad's been talking to you," laughed the woodsman. "I'll admit he had me going for a few days there, about the time I wrote to you, but thinking it all over I can't see any reason for believing the doctor is doing anything except what he says he is. He tends to his own business and never leaves the place."

"How about this cabin Jimmie Lad saw in the swamp, and Rakow going into it, and no moose feeding in a lake where they should be thick?" asked Jimmie Dunn.

The boy stiffened in his chair and looked straight at the woodsman. Tom, clearly in discomfort, busied himself with his pipe. When he did finally speak he continued to tamp the ashes into the bowl, giving the operation his closest attention.

"He says he saw the cabin there," he stated impersonally. "He says he was there two days running and saw the doctor the first day and that half-witted fellow the next. Now, I was on that lake last Summer, walked all around it, and there wasn't any cabin there, or anywhere near it."

"There is a cabin there now," declared Jimmie Lad hotly, "and I saw Doctor Rakow go into it. And I heard a boy yell on the lake shore, and I saw the print of a boy's foot on the trail. I know it."

"I think," said Tom, still avoiding the boy's eyes, "that he got mixed up in his directions in the swamp. There is a little muskeg lake over to the west and there is an old cabin on the south shore of it, just an old trapping shack."

"This cabin wasn't on the shore, but a quarter of a mile back in the swamp north of the lake," interrupted the boy defiantly. "And if you go with me tomorrow I'll show it to you."

"What are you thinking of doing about Benton, Tom?" asked Jimmie Dunn quickly.

"There's nothing to do," was the answer. "Ed's got away by now and there ain't much use in trying to get him. We might give the police a description of him, but I know Ed too well to think he's going to hang around any place where there's a chance of getting him. He'll drop off the train in some bush town and hide himself, probably doing over again what he did here. We might get him in time, but there's no use breaking our necks right now. Anyhow, I'm too near played out to think about it or to follow up that crazy story about the money in the baking-powder can. I'm going to bed."

JIMMIE DUNN, too, was tired after his long journey in from the railroad, and the relief in finding Jimmie Lad safe and in seeing Tom Gill again in the club-house after three days' disquieting absence, had its reaction. Jimmie Lad himself, wide-eyed and excited, did not start at once for his room. He sat in the kitchen until the other two had gone to their rooms and then, with much heavy tramping and slamming of doors, went to his own room.

Five minutes later Jimmie Dunn entered the dark main room, listened a moment, and then tiptoed to Tom Gill's door. He pushed it open, entered, and then closed it tightly.

"What about this cabin the boy tells about, Tom?" he asked.

"It ain't there at all. If it was I'd know it. I was all through that swamp late last Summer."

"But he says he saw it, and saw Doctor Rakow there."

Tom was silent.

"Look here!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn angrily. "You don't mean to infer he's not telling the truth? Jimmie Lad wouldn't lie."

"There's no cabin there," was the dogged answer.

Jimmie Dunn turned angrily toward the door.

"I don't mean he's lying a-purpose," the woodsman conceded. "He's Marshall Wells' son. I know as well as you do that he wouldn't do that. He's not that kind. But you can see for yourself, Jimmie. This is the first time he has been in the big bush and he tells how he crossed that swamp and comes back again. It was cloudy both those days, and you know how easy it is to get turned 'round in a thick spruce swamp. If you want to know what I think, he did find that other lake

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and see that old shack, and he just got to thinking, is all. You know, he does a lot of thinking about things that you can only think about."

"You mean he has a rather vivid imagination," suggested Jimmie Dunn, smiling to himself in the darkness as he remembered Jimmie Lad's similar attempt to make known his belief that Tom Gill had no imagination at all.

"That's it," answered the woodsman. "He imagines anything he pleases, and now that I've had more time to think about it I can see where he fooled me, like I wrote you. He's read too many of those detective stories."

"Of course," said Jimmie slowly, "we could go over and see whether this cabin is there. Under the circumstances we really owe it to the lad even if it does infringe on the doctor's privacy a bit. You know, after all, if you and Marshall had only believed in the things your could see, that you would have left me up in the Barren Grounds with a band of savages."

"And that is the only reason," interrupted Tom, "that I will take Jimmie Lad and you to that lake to prove that there is no cabin there."

"Well, that ought to satisfy every one," answered Jimmie Dunn with relief. "We will talk it over in the morning. Now I'm going to bed."

He did not sleep for a time because, despite Tom Gill's assurances, his suspicions of Doctor Rakow persisted. He studied each one separately but in no way could he piece together the bits of evidence to support any theory that things were not as they should be at the scientist's retreat.

Both Tom and Jimmie Dunn slept late the next morning, and it was after nine o'clock when they appeared at the main room of the club-house.

"Where's Jimmie Lad?" asked Tom. "There's no sign of his eating breakfast and he ain't in his room."

"Perhaps he's out in a canoe fishing," said Jimmie Dunn. "He'll show up when he sees smoke."

"He'll see a lot of smoke," said Tom as he laid a fire in the kitchen stove. "I'm sure ready to eat a meal this morning."

He spent more than half an hour in its preparation. Jimmie Dunn walked about the place looking for the boy, but did not find him.

"That little canoe is gone," he said when he sat down to the table.

Tom Gill looked up quickly, questioningly.

"You don't mean," asked Jimmie Dunn in sudden anxiety, "that he's gone off to find that cabin again, just to prove it to us?"

"He was mighty quiet when I said what I thought last night, you remember, and he didn't say anything after that. He's a strange lad in some ways, and——"

"He was hurt by your refusal to take him seriously," interrupted Jimmie Dunn. "He thinks his veracity is assailed, and he's gone after proof."

He stopped suddenly and looked at the woodsman.

"Tom," he said, "what if it is true, all that he says and thinks? He's just stubborn enough to make his case good, and if there is anything strange in Rakow's actions he's putting himself right in the man's power."

The woodsman looked at him for a moment and then began to eat hurriedly. Jimmie Dunn followed his example and in five minutes, each armed with a rifle, they were running down the beach to the canoe shed.

"We can catch him before he gets there," said Tom reassuringly when he saw Jimmie Dunn's hands tremble as he lifted a sixteen-footer into the water.

In a moment they were speeding across the lake toward the mouth of a river which would lead them into the country to which they believed the boy had gone. For an hour and a half they paddled in silence. They portaged across into a lake, passed into a small stream leading to another lake and then, rounding a sharp bend, almost collided with another canoe.

"Uncle Jimmie!" cried the lone paddler of the craft. "I've got him!"

"Got who?"

"Rakow! He's the one who was in with Benton, just as I said. He's the one who got his share of the money."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Jimmie Dunn in amazement. "And where have you been?"

"I left the club-house last night as soon as you were asleep," answered the boy excitedly. "I paddled most of the night to get to Two Island Lake before daylight. I did, and I hid beside the cabin. and this

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morning sure enough some one came for the money."

"Not Rakow?" demanded Jimmie Dunn.

"No, but it was that half-witted fellow who works for him. I watched him through a crack between the logs. He found the baking-powder can under the pole floor just as Benton told Tom, and he opened it and took out the money. But he didn't put it in his pocket or take it away. Instead he dug out another can under another part of the floor and put the money in it.

"He stayed there an hour, counting the bills and smoothing them all out and rolling them up and unrolling them, and kissing and patting them. The flies nearly killed me while I waited. I couldn't brush them off because he might hear me." And the boy rubbed his swollen and bleeding face.

"Jimmie Lad," demanded Jimmie Dunn severely, "what sort of a tale is this?"

The boy's eyes glowed as he looked at the two men. Victory shone in them, an elation which added to Jimmie Dunn's growing fears. Then the youngster bent forward and lifted something from the bottom of the canoe.

"Here it is," he said as he held out a baking-powder can to Jimmie Dunn. "Count it yourself. Two hundred and fifty dollars, just as Benton said. I guess Benton wasn't lying about anything, Tom."

CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR RAKOW AT HOME

DUMFOUNDED by the boy's announcement, Jimmie Dunn mechanically opened the can and removed a large roll of bills. The sight and touch of the money brought the conviction which surprise had delayed.

"There is something in this Rakow business, Tom!" he exclaimed. "There is something queer going on here! What can he be up to?"

"He's a kidnaper!" declared Jimmie Lad quickly. "Just as I said all along. And we can prove it."

Both the boy and Jimmie Dunn were greatly excited, the youngster with visions of routing a gang of dangerous criminals, the older man with thoughts of Mrs. Rakow's warning and the possibilities of some illegal operations conducted within and under cover of the game-preserve.

He did not think for a moment that the boy was right in his deductions that the doctor was the head of a band which was stealing the children of wealthy parents and holding them for ransom. He did recognize the probability of an illicit enterprise of a scientific nature, and thoughts of opium smuggling and the drug trade flashed through his mind.

"There is something, all right!" he exclaimed excitedly. "He could manufacture any unlawful or contraband drug or other laboratory product and get it across the line by canoe without discovery."

"Rot!" snorted Tom Gill. "You are as bad as the boy with your imagining things. How does finding this baking-powder can full of bills in a log shack in the middle of the preserve prove Doctor Rakow stole a rich man's boy in New York or is making pills Uncle Sam don't allow across the line?"

"It's a blind!" declared Jimmie Lad impetuously. "He's a smooth one, that doctor, or he never would have figured out this scheme of coming here where he wouldn't get caught. And if he is that smooth he wouldn't take chances because he thought he was safe here.

"He wanted something to cover his tracks, and what better could there be than a poacher to keep Tom busy and make tracks and travel through the preserve? And you don't want to forget that I heard a boy yell in the swamp by that little lake and saw the print of a boy's foot on the trail."

Jimmie Dunn looked at the woodsman questioningly.

"You two can make out anything against that man!" Tom exclaimed derisively.

"But this money, Tom!" protested Jimmie Dunn. "You can't get around that. And the doctor's man was the one who came and got it, as Benton said some one would. Benton told you he was tired of playing another man's game and that he'd squeal if he could prove anything, or if we could."

"If the doctor was getting his share of that meat money, why didn't he get it, instead of leaving it under the floor of that old shack?" demanded Tom. "I tell you I've known Ed Benton for a long time, and if there's a smooth one in this preserve he's the one. His game is plain as daylight.

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If I'd caught him instead of his catching me the other day, he'd have claimed he was in with Rakow, figuring we'd rather let him go than stir up a mess."

"He wouldn't give up a third of his money to guard against that chance, and in such a flimsy way," objected Jimmie Dunn. "And the doctor's man went for the money. Maybe he told the doctor there was none there. Rakow knows of this. There can't be any doubt."

"The whole thing is too darned foolish," declared Tom. "Look here. Ed Benton saw this half-witted lad go to that old shack and followed to see what he was doing. He saw him looking at this money just as Jimmie Lad saw him this morning, and then waited and counted it himself and cooked up this story. It's nonsense to say Rakow is in with him. I've seen Rakow several times and he ain't got a thought for anything in the world but that laboratory of his and what he does in it."

"Benton would have stolen it first, if that's so," interrupted Jimmie Lad. "And besides, where would that half-witted fellow ever get two hundred and fifty dollars? Then I saw him take a few bills out of one can and put them in this can with all the rest."

"Listen a moment, Tom," said Jimmie Dunn, and he sketched fully his last interview with Mrs. Rakow.

As he talked Jimmie Lad drew his canoe closer and watched the older man's face intently. His lips twitched, his eyes were bright with excitement, and when the story was finished he cried:

"That proves it! That proves it! He is a kidnaper, and his wife knows it, and she knew it was her duty to put Uncle Jimmie on his guard! Uncle Jimmie! We'll do it! We'll capture him in his den and rescue the stolen children and take them back to the States. But," he added soberly, "we'll have to fight. He's not the sort who will be taken alive."

Tom turned away in disgust and caught a willow branch to hold the canoes from drifting farther downstream.

"There is this much certain," said Jimmie Dunn. "Everything leads to grave suspicions that things are not as they are represented at Rakow's place. None of us has ever been there. We have respected his strange request that he be not molested. There has been every opportunity for him to do whatever he may have wished to do. His wife's statements, this money business, what Jimmie Lad has seen, all point to something out of the way.

"As president of the preserve corporation, it's up to me to find out what it is, and at once. If a crime, or crimes, are being committed, we must know it. It is not only our duty but there is the possibility of our being held as accessories. I'm going to Rakow's place today and demand that he tell me what he is doing and insist upon an explanation of this Benton affair and the fact that his man was in possession of money obtained through the illegal sale of moose killed upon the preserve."

Tom Gill turned and looked at his old friend for a moment. Years spent together in far places had given him an intimate understanding of Jimmie Dunn, and he knew that his decision could not be altered. And Tom, as usual in such circumstances, sought a compromise.

"Look here, Jimmie," he began. "I'm not sticking up for this Rakow. He never did anything to be friendly to me though we have have been practically alone on the preserve for more than a year. He never let on he thought I was anything but a part of the furniture of the place. But even if that is so, I don't accuse any man unless I know pretty well what I'm talking about. When I see a thing, that's different.

"Now listen here. You go up to his place today and something will bust wide open. I know you. You'll try to be fair and polite and give him a chance but as soon as you start talking you'll get hot and imagine things and there'll be a row and you won't learn anything.

"Let me go up. I'm not excited about this, but I'm perfectly willing to believe what I see, and I'll keep my eyes open, which you wouldn't do after the first five minutes, and I'll come back and tell you exactly what I saw and heard and what he says. Then, if we think there's something funny going on, we will know what we are doing. Now we would only be going it blind."

"He'll only be angry if you go to his place because you are not supposed to go within a mile of it," objected Jimmie Dunn. "As president of the preserve corporation, there can be no objection to my going under the circumstances."

"I've got a pretty good excuse," said

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Tom. "I'll tell him about Benton and I'll make out it was me that watched the old shack on Two Island Lake and saw his man get the money. I'll talk as if he ought to know what that half-witted fellow is doing.

"Then, again, I think it would be better not to let him know you are here. Just your being on the preserve would put him on his guard. He doesn't even know Jimmie Lad is here, though it's been nearly a month since he came. He thinks I'm nothing but a sort of caretaker and foolish from living in the bush all my life, and he'll think it's easy to get ahead of me. Then, if I do find out something, we can bring you in as a surprise."

JIMMIE DUNN knew few men were possessed of keener powers of observation that Tom Gill, or a more level-headed shrewdness. He saw, too, the strategic advantage of keeping himself out of sight, and, though Jimmie Lad's face showed his disappointment, he agreed to the woodsman's proposal.

"Get into this canoe, lad," commanded Tom as he drew the boy's small craft closer. "You and your uncle paddle back to the club-house and I'll take the little canoe and go right on up. Might be a good idea for me to take the money along to back up what I'm saying."

"When will we expect you?" asked Jimmie Dunn when the transfer had been made.

"I ought to be back before dark easy enough."

The woodsman turned his canoe down stream and paddled around a bend. The others started back in the direction of the club-house.

Jimmie Lad's route to Two Island Lake was the same as that to Doctor Rakow's retreat for another mile. Tom Gill simply did not make the portage into Two Island Lake but kept on to a small stream that led to a large lake, at the far end of which the scientist had built his laboratory. Tom had been on the lake many times in his patrols but the northwest bay, long and screened by a row of islands across its mouth, was teritory sacred to Rakow. The islands marked the limits of the retreat and Tom had not been beyond them for more than a year.

Hard-headed, practical, never given to fanciful deductions or idle dreaming because his life had been a continual contest with concrete, tangible things, the woodsman started on his journey to Doctor Rakow's with much the same mental attitude he would have in making a patrol trip of the preserve. His mind was open in the same way that his eyes and ears were ready for any sign or sound, and his mental vision as clear as the physical sight which encompassed everything upon the water and along the shores.

He paddled straight up the center of the bay and at last rounded a point to catch his first glimpse of the Rakow place since it had been finished more than a year before. There were two buildings, both of logs, one a plain, three-room affair nearer the water and most evidently the residence. One hundred yards to the left, partially screened from the lake and from the other structure by spruce and pine was a long building. The south side, from the glimpses Tom could get through the trees, seemed to be given almost entirely to windows.

Before the buildings was a steep drop to a narrow beach and behind them, rising precipitously, was a ridge of the rock so common in the district. At the right this cliff pushed out to the lake, rising straight from huge boulders and the water, with the result that it was impossible to leave the place by land except through the swamp which extended to the south and west from the bay.

No one was in sight as Tom paddled across the quarter of a mile of open water from the point to the beach. He heard the sound of an ax in the swamp and concluded that the half-witted servant was cutting wood. Then a dog barked, a single, sharp yelp of warning, and a moment later there came clearly the sound of a door in the laboratory opening and closing.

A figure could be seen behind the trees and then the scientist walked out into the open, down the bank and across the beach. As Tom paddled up and grounded his canoe Doctor Rakow stood there, silent, frowning impatiently.

At a distance the man's appearance had been striking. The background of Northern forest, rock and water, of rough log buildings, worn-out birchbark canoe and sharp-eared Indian dog was completely at variance with the trim, white, immaculate laboratory

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suit. There was a suggestion of the military in the cut and collar of the man's jacket, in his bearing, and the poise of his head. Jimmie Dunn would have likened the scene at once to a pastoral painting in which the artist had placed, without reason, a man in evening clothes.

The doctor's face was as clear and cold as science itself. Dark, handsome, distinguished, it was a countenance that would have attracted immediate attention anywhere. The forehead and eyes gave unmistakable evidences of clear, straight thinking, of that eager, alert, driving search for facts which, with an accompanying assurance of competence, has resulted in the physiognomy peculiar to twentieth-century success.

Before all this, however, there wavered a distinct foreign haze. The dark tinge of the skin, the peculiar blackness of the hair, the tilt of the mustache, the carriage of the head, the set of the shoulders, each was slightly un-American, though adding to the distinguished appearance of the man. They gave, too, the idea of the patrician, and this was accentuated by his cold, assured voice.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came on business," answered Tom, whose gaze had not wavered before Rakow's impersonal stare.

"There is no business that can bring you here. You have violated the strict rules laid down by your employers. Leave at once."

Tom laid his paddle across the gunwales and stared straight into the doctor's face.

"I will when I find out what I've come to find out," he answered steadily.

"There is nothing here that can interest you, nothing you have any right to ask," Rakow replied with some heat.

There is no type of man in the world more completely independent than the old woodsman. Through a long lifetime he has won in a struggle with a hostile environment and he has been completely the master of his own life and actions. He knows that before the wilderness all men are equal and nothing nettles him more quickly or more thoroughly than an assumption of authority.

Tom was of this type and, where the suspicions of Jimmie Dunn and Jimmie Lad had failed to influence him against Doctor Rakow, the scientist's manner aroused a resentment that was more dangerous.

"It's my business to keep this preserve patroled and not let any one from the outside shoot meat," he declared.

"Exactly. And see that you do nothing else. Otherwise I will report you to the officers of the preserve corporation."

"It's because I can't report to them immediately that I'm here now," answered Tom. "Thirty moose have been shot inside the preserve in the last year."

"My dear man!" exclaimed the doctor wearily. "I am not interested in the game except in so far as I would like to see the interests of my fellow members protected. I am a member because I desire absolute seclusion for my work and believed I could get it by this method. I can not trouble myself with the preservation of the game."

He turned his back and started toward the laboratory.

"Listen here!" said Tom sharply. "I know who has been killing this meat, where he sold it, how much he got and what was done with the money."

Doctor Rakow turned and looked impatiently at the woodsman.

"He said he was not alone, that he had a partner, and that if I watched the old shack on Two Island Lake I'd find out who it was."

"Please, my good man," interrupted the doctor, "write that out and mail it to Mr. Dunn. He is the man who should know, and he is interested. I am not."

Again he tuned up the bank.

"I watched that shack," continued Tom evenly, for he now had control of himself and was playing the game calmly and with a zest for the matching of wits which he felt was coming, "and this morning your man went to it and got one-third of the money paid for the last sale of moose meat."

Doctor Rakow merely looked at Tom. He was not startled. He was not angry. He did not appear to be interested. His attitude nettled the woodsman, who exclaimed hotly—

"That is why it was my business to come here today, and that is what I want to find out about."

"But it is too absurd even to consider for a moment," declared the doctor.

For answer Tom lifted the baking-powder can from the bottom of the canoe and took off the cover, exposing the green roll within.

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CHAPTER V

AN INTERRUPTED EXPERIMENT

SUDDENLY interested, Doctor Rakow walked back to the beach.

"Tell me about this," he said as he extended his hand for the money.

"I watched that cabin as I told you," said Tom as he reached out the can. "I was told by the man who did the shooting that he turned over a third of the money to his partner, hiding it under the floor of this old shack so it could be found the twenty-fifth of every month. This morning your man came to the cabin, took the money from under the floor and counted it. Then, instead of taking it away he put it with this and hid it under the floor in another place. After he went I got it."

"This is most interesting," said the doctor as he examined the roll. "How much is there?"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars, which is what I said had been turned over."

"And 'Semper' has been getting it every month?"

"Who?"

"Semper Eadem. That is what I call him, the man who works for me."

"I thought his name was Joe Bayliss."

"Something like that, I believe," and Doctor Rakow smiled for the first time. "The other is Latin, you know. Queen Elizabeth's motto. Means 'Always the same.' Semper, you see, has the mentality of a sixteen-year-old boy. It never will develop. His mind stands still, never grows, though he is twenty-four years old. That is why I have him. Semper serves a double purpose, servant and subject for experiment, you see."

The doctor's manner had changed entirely and Tom looked at him with some suspicion.

"I wish you would tell me more about this," continued the scientist. "It is in line with some experiments I have been conducting with Semper for a year past. I have noticed an inordinate greed for money. He has it hidden all over the place, money I have left where he could find it. He is perfectly trustworthy in every other respect. You say this is the exact amount that has been left there?"

"I was told that thirty moose had been sold at twenty-five dollars each and that a third of it was left for the other fellow in the old shack on Two Island Lake. That makes two hundred and fifty, and that's what there is in the can."

"Quite remarkable," commented the doctor with increased interest. "Won't you come up to the laboratory? The mosquitoes and black flies are bad in the open. We can talk there. You were right in coming to me, for we must get to the bottom of this, though I am certain we will find nothing more serious than the work of a boy whose moral conceptions are not of the highest, perhaps. But as I am responsible for him I must right any wrong that has been done."

Doctor Rakow led the way up the bank, through the trees and into the laboratory. Though the building was about forty by twenty, Tom was surprised to find it one large room with no partitions. The equipment was wholly unfamiliar to the woodsman. Had he had any scientific knowledge he would have recognized that, while the east end of the room was devoted to a fairly well-equipped chemical workshop, the long side on the south, with its many windows, was given over entirely to bacteriological work.

Tom made a quick but comprehensive survey of the place. He knew at once it was some sort of a laboratory, but because he was a woodsman and not a scientist he was impressed, not by the completeness of the equipment, but by the amount of work that had been necessary in the creation of such a place so far from the railroad.

Everywhere about him were innumerable glass vessels of all sizes, queer glass boxes heated by flues from an alcohol lamp, and two glittering, many-screwed microscopes. Tables were arranged in the middle of the room, all covered with more of the equipment.

The west end was evidently the library. There was a large, flat-topped desk over which many papers were neatly arranged in piles. A small table supported a typewriter, and against the wall were a dozen cases filled with books.

"This is my workroom," explained Doctor Rakow as he closed the door. "You are the first person who has been in it, excepting myself, since it was completed. Semper is never allowed inside the door as I am very particular about all my equipment

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and papers, and, as I explained, he has the mentality of a sixteen-year-old boy and the accompanying inquisitiveness."

He walked across the room to a cupboard and opened the door, then closed it again.

"I had hoped to offer you what I understand is the customary wilderness hospitality," he said as he turned away, "but I find that I have no Scotch here. Take a seat for a moment while I look after one of my experiments and then we will go to the residence, where we can have a glass while I tell you about Semper and also get all the information you have. It is very inconvenient to have this matter come up at this time as some of my work has reached the stage where it requires my constant attention."

Tom sat down near the desk and looked about the room again. Doctor Rakow went to one of the benches on the south wall, opened the door of a glass box and took out a test-tube, using a pair of long, silver-coated pliers. He removed a minute portion of the muddy liquid within the test-tube, placed it on a glass slide, added coloring matter, and placed it under a microscope.

Each movement was precise, slow, carefully made, and once he had focused his instrument he bent over the eye-piece for some time. At last, with a gesture of annoyance and a frown of impatience, he removed the slide with the pliers, held it for a time in an alcohol flame and then turned to Tom.

"Now we will go to the residence," he said, and led the way out of the building.

As Tom Gill followed the scientist toward the other cabin he glanced quickly about him. The underbrush had been cleared away in the immediate vicinity, the builders' refuse cleaned up and a neat, park-like aspect given to the place. Only one trail left the building, a path through the trees to the residence, and in the soft earth were only the prints of the heelless canvas shoes the doctor wore.

Near the residence, however, though the same neatness prevailed, there were other trails. One led down to the water, another to an icehouse back beneath the cliff, a third to the woodpile and a fourth toward the west into the swamp, from which the sounds of an ax still came. Nowhere, and Tom looked carefully, were there any footprints except those made by the rubber-soled shoes of the scientist and the tracks of the hobnailed cruisers' shoes which Semper Eadem wore.

DOCTOR RAKOW threw open the door and stood aside for Tom to enter. It was a small room, serving as both kitchen and dining-room. At one end the door of what was evidently Semper's bedroom stood open, while on the other side, facing the lake and the sun, was a large, bright, cheerful apartment unmistakably the scientist's private quarters.

Here the austerity of the laboratory gave way to the attractiveness of a room arranged by a man who knows both comfort and the manner of obtaining it. Navaho rugs were on the floor, a large table was covered with books, and a great, deep chair was invitingly convenient to a student lamp.

The doctor opened a cupboard and took out glasses and a bottle.

"Now let me understand things," he began when the ceremony was ended. "This poacher made the statement that he had a partner with whom he shared the proceeds of his moose-killing?"

Tom nodded.

"And that this partner would call for the money at a deserted cabin on Two Island Lake the twenty-fifth of the month? Where is this lake?"

"About five miles southeast of you."

"Five miles by water?"

"Yes, with one portage."

"Semper could make the trip in three hours then?"

"If he hurried. But he spent an hour in the shack counting over his money and acting as if it was a pet dog."

"I have noticed the same thing here when I have surprised him at his hiding-places," said the doctor. "He has a mania for money, with a decided preference for bills. But that is not the point. How could it have been possible for any one who was clever enough to kill thirty moose and remove them from the preserve to believe a man of Semper's mentality could be of any possible aid? That is what perplexes me, and that is the factor which would be of value."

"Didn't you ever notice that he was gone for half a day every month?" asked Tom.

"Semper arranges his work to suit himself. I am interested only in results and I have established a system whereby they are

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obtained without attention on my part. It is only in the evening, when we are alone in this building, that I have conducted my psychological experiments with Semper."

"Why don't you ask him about this business?" suggested Tom.

"He would simply deny it and there are times when I seriously doubt his ability to remember certain things. His mind takes queer twists and turns and all my carefully collected data is full of inconsistencies.

"But I must hurry back to the laboratory," and the doctor looked at his watch. "It is time for another test. Let me suggest this. You make every effort to apprehend the poacher. In the meantime I will question Semper, watch his movements, even may be able to suggest that he go to Two Island Lake on some pretext.

"He will be greatly upset by finding that his money is gone and I may be able to learn something. As soon as I do I will write out a complete report, send it to you, and you can forward it to Mr. Dunn in Chicago. I am sure that will be satisfactory."

"I guess it will be," answered Tom as he studied the scientist's face. "If you never heard of this business before but will try to find out what you can, it's all that's to be expected. If I find out anything I'll come up and tell you."

"No!" exclaimed Rakow sharply. "I have overlooked your coming today because I realize that you felt it necessary. But my privacy must be unmolested. Even this morning, though I have appeared to be giving you my time, my mind has been busy with my work. I am in the midst of important experiments. I have spent my money here and sought this place to have absolute freedom from everything except my work and I must insist that the agreement be kept. In the future send a letter by Semper when he passes the clubhouse with the mail."

Again the doctor looked at his watch and immediately he sprang to his feet.

"That is all," he announced as he started toward the door. "I must go to the laboratory immediately."

He did not even wait to see if Tom left the room but hurried up the trail toward the other building, still holding his watch in his hand. At last he broke into a run and the woodsman heard the laboratory door slam behind him.

"No wonder he wants to be alone if he feels that way about it," muttered Tom. "A silver gray in a trap wouldn't upset me any more than that."

He picked up the baking-powder can of bills which the doctor had carried from the laboratory, and started toward the door. He was more satisfied than ever that all suspicions of the scientist were absolutely without foundation, yet it suddenly occurred to him that he had nothing except his own impressions to carry back to Jimmie Dunn, nothing more tangible in Rakow's defense than the statements of the other two in accusation.

He hesitated an instant, then placed the can of money back upon the table and hurried out of the cabin. He went straight to his canoe and paddled out toward the point which cut off the end of the bay.

Once past this Tom turned in to shore, drew out his canoe and climbed up through the brush until he had a view of the doctor's retreat across the quarter of a mile of water. He could not see any one. The sounds of the ax continued in the swamp. Rakow evidently was busy within the laboratory. After half an hour, when nothing had occurred, Tom crawled back to his canoe and paddled to the head of the bay.

This time there was no announcement of his approach by the dog, no white-clad figure coming toward the beach through the trees. The woodsman landed without his presence being known and immediately climbed the bank to the residence. Before the door he hesitated a moment and then started on to the laboratory. At the corner of the building he met Doctor Rakow face to face.

NOTHING he had ever heard of the doctor and nothing in their previous interview had prepared Tom for the change in this baffling individual. His easy, cool, assured manner had deserted him entirely. He was a man entirely in the grip of a blinding rage. For a moment he stood there, inarticulate with fury, pointing a shaking forefinger almost in the astonished woodsman's face.

Then words came, words which, it seemed to Tom, must come to save the man from insanity. Curses, denunciation, threats poured out in one overwhelming torrent

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of passionate outburst. The scientist seemed to be as unable to stop as at first he had been unable to begin.

Tom stood there silent and unmoved because he knew that the outburst must vent itself and that nothing he could say or do would have any effect until it had.

Then for the first time he saw and recognized an object which, swaying with each passionate explosion, the doctor held by a long pair of tongs. It was a child's cotton shirt.

Immediately every fanciful suspicion of Jimmie Lad's rushed to his mind and he stood there, his attention riveted upon the garment.

It was only after several moments of vituperation, the violence of which Tom could only guess because much of it was in a foreign tongue, that Rakow realized the direction of Tom's gaze. The effect was instantaneous. The shirt was lowered by a quick, involuntary movement and the scientist Tom had known before, cool, assured, superior, seemed almost miraculously to step out from the shrieking maniac.

"I beg your pardon," he said calmly. "You see why it is that I can not be disturbed. An experiment upon which I have spent months was interrupted, completely spoiled by your reappearance. Naturally I lost my temper. After my expressed wish it was inexcusable on your part."

"I had to come back," explained Tom. "Never thought you would get so stirred up about it. You needn't have stopped. I could have waited until you were through. But I left that can of money and I came after it right away because I was afraid that half-witted fellow might find it."

"That would have been disastrous to our plans. But at least it would not have spoiled an experiment. However, take it away. The money is not lawfully Semper's. You had better give it to Mr. Dunn. I believe it is in here."

As Tom stepped aside while the doctor opened the door to the residence he looked again at the shirt. He did so intentionally, determined if possible to force Rakow to an explanation. The scientist saw his glance and met his wish.

"This is just another of that boy's peculiarities," he said. "He not only has a mania for getting and hiding money but he insists upon keeping all the clothing he had as a youngster. It was about the time he wore this shirt, I imagine, that he ceased to develop, and he has a chest full of the things. I did not discover what they were until recently.

"I had never been quite sure of his early history or the exact cause of his trouble, and it has occurred to me that it might be traced to some disease. I took one of his shirts several days ago, made a culture from some dark spots I found on it, and before tomorrow night I expect to be certain what it is."

He crossed the room to the kitchen stove and, lifting a lid, lowered the shirt into the firebox, being carfeul that it did not touch the top. Then he placed birch-bark on top, covered that with rich, dry pine, and lighted it.

"Until I know I can not take any chances," he explained as he watched the fire. "It might be something virulent, such as—" and he launched into a list of malignant contagious diseases and references to them which were as Greek to the woodsman.

"Now we will get the money," he said, when the fire was burning well.

He went into his own room, picked up the can from the table and handed it to Tom.

"Since you came at all I am glad it was before Semper found it," he said. "But," and his tone hardened, "remember that this is to be the last intrusion. I will not countenance any more interruptions. I will communicate with you by letter if I learn anything, and you may do the same with me."

He turned his back abruptly and went into his own room. Tom walked out, went down to the beach and paddled away.

CHAPTER VI

JIMMIE LAD'S CABIN

IN THE dusk of the late June evening Jimmie Dunn and Jimmie Lad walked down to the beach when they saw Tom Gill's canoe across the lake. As he came within earshot they listened impatiently for an announcement of the results of the visit to Rakow's retreat, but the woodsman drew up to the sand and stepped out of the

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canoe with nothing more than a grumbling announcement that he was hungry.

"But how about it, Tom?" demanded Jimmie Dunn. "What did you find out? Is he a villain or have we been a couple of silly fools?"

"Darned if I know," was the answer. "I'm all mixed up myself now. Maybe he is and maybe he isn't. How about supper?" And he started at once for the club-house.

"Did you see any kid's tracks?" asked Jimmie Lad excitedly as he walked beside Tom.

"No, but I saw a kid's shirt. He was carrying it with a pair of tongs as if it was too dirty to touch, and he burned it up. Only he said the shirt was Semper Eadem's."

"Whose?" demanded Jimmie Dunn.

"Semper Eadem's. That's what he calls that half-witted lad who works for him. Says it's Latin or something and means 'Always the same.' Says the lad's got the mind of a sixteen-year-old boy if he is a grown man and he's always experimenting on him. Seems to me it's not decent to bother a poor simpleton like that."

"But the money?" insisted Jimmie Dunn. "How did he explain that?"

They had entered the kitchen and Tom, because the others were too excited and eager for information to be of any assistance, began the preparations for his own meal.

"Rakow wouldn't even get excited about it," he answered as he poked up the fire. "Is that all of the bannock there is left? He didn't even deny he'd ever seen Benton or knew anything about it. Just seemed to take it for granted no one would ever suspect him of such a thing. He said this Semper was crazy about money and has it hid all over the place, and it would be natural for him to have that hid in the shack on Two Island Lake."

"But how does he explain Semper being in with Benton and getting a share of the proceeds of the sale of moose meat?" asked Jimmie Dunn.

"He just didn't explain it. Said he would ask the lad and try to find out and then write me about it."

"Write to you?"

"Yes. He ordered me off of the place and said I wasn't to come back no matter what happens."

Jimmie Dunn and Jimmie Lad had left a supper in the oven to keep warm for Tom and the boy forgot his interest in Rakow long enough to remember it. The woodsman had not eaten since morning, and until the hunger pangs had vanished he refused to talk.

Then, his pipe lighted, he began at the first and related in detail everything he had seen and heard in his visit to the scientist's retreat. His recital was not only photographic, in so far as he described the buildings, their surroundings, their contents and the actions and appearance of Rakow, but he portrayed with equal vividness the scientist's manner and attitude, his sudden change from cold reserve to maniacal anger followed by a condescending friendliness and abrupt dismissal.

"So you can take it any way you please," he concluded. "Either everything is just as we always thought it was, and that shirt really is Semper's, as he calls him, or it's all a blind and there is a boy there we don't know anything about. You two are good at imagining things. Maybe you can make something out of it. I'm right where I was before, except that I like him less than ever."

"It seems to me, Tom," said Jimmie Dunn, "that he made an effort to let you see everything there. He took you to the laboratory for a drink when he must have known there was none there, and then into the residence. Why did he do that?"

"I thought of that, too, and maybe he planned it that way and maybe he didn't."

"And then there is the question of the shirt. Your seeing it either brought him out of his rage or else your meeting him with it threw him into one. You don't seem to be able to say which. But doesn't that mean something? It was the only time he lost control of himself. Could not that mean that the shirt was the one thing he didn't want you to see and that your sudden appearance might have upset his plans?"

"Maybe so, and yet he explained it easy enough. Don't you see? You've got to guess on everything I saw and heard. There's nothing you can put your finger on and know for sure it's the thing you're pointing at."

"And that dog barking just once," broke in Jimmie Lad. "Most dogs would bark all the time you were crossing the bay. He's trained to do that, to warn the doctor

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when any one comes. And you said the doctor came right down to the beach."

"But he didn't bark at all the second time I came back," Tom answered with a grin.

"That's because he got used to your being there," was the boy's ready answer. "He saw his master take you into the buildings and thought you were all right."

Until late at night they sat there, going over and over all that Tom had reported, everything he had seen and heard. When at last Tom announced that he was going to bed they were forced to admit that they knew nothing more of value than before his visit to the Rakow place.

"Except this," announced Jimmie Dunn. "We may not have proved anything against him, but we haven't cleared him. We must make sure of this thing, satisfy ourselves that he is innocent of anything we may think, or prove whatever is to be proved against him."

"How are you going to do it?" asked Tom. "Go over and ask him?"

"Go over there and watch his place without his knowing we are around," answered Jimmie Dunn decisively. "We have some strong binoculars here, and there are places around that bay in which we can hide and have a good view of the place and of everything that goes on there."

Jimmie Lad's eyes danced as his foster-uncle spoke and Tom Gill, to the other's surprise, admitted the idea was a good one.

"In the morning," answered Jimmie Dunn. "We'll take two canoes along, and some grub, so that if it is necessary to keep some one on the job all the time one of us can get back here. You are sure Rakow never suspected my being here?"

"I'm not sure, but he didn't seem to. I wouldn't guess anything about him. He's either perfectly all right and just queer, or he's the smoothest man I ever run into making you believe there's nothing wrong."

"And Jimmie Lad? Does he know he is here?"

"He's never seen me," answered the boy, "but Semper has."

"Did Semper hear your name or anything about who you might be?"

"I only saw him once, that day he came up in a canoe when I was sitting on the dock and he was talking to himself, that time he kept saying over and over, 'darn those pesky kids.' I just said 'hello,' but he wouldn't talk and went on up to the clubhouse and got something from Tom and left right away."

"He talks enough to me," grumbled Tom. "All the time he's with me, though it's mostly a lot of nonsense."

"By George," broke in Jimmie Dunn, "I can't make anything out of the tangle. That half-witted lad grumbling about the kids seems like a valuable clue. And yet because of his mental condition we can't place any dependence on it. If we could only find out if there really are any children then we might have something to work on."

"And the best way to do it is to go and find that cabin where I saw the kid's track in the trail."

The boy leaned across the table as he spoke, looking eagerly into the faces of the men. His body quivered like that of a dog which has smelled game. There was no sleepiness in the wide, dancing eyes.

Jimmie Dunn and Tom glanced quickly at each other, remembering their agreement of the night before.

"You're right, son," Jimmie Dunn answered soberly. "If there is anything in this at all, that cabin will prove it. We'll go."

THE next morning all three were in a canoe, paddling to the west side of the preserve and to the lake from which Jimmie Lad had walked northward to the big swamp and the unknown muskeg pond. Jimmie Dunn shared much of the youngster's eagerness, for he had not doubted the boy's veracity for an instant. Tom Gill, certain that he knew each foot of the preserve, yet willing to give Jimmie Lad every opportunity, paddled steadily with the air of a man who believes he is right and patiently awaits vindication.

When they landed on the north shore of the lake where Tom and the boy had camped, Jimmie Lad immediately started north over a low ridge and down into the swamp.

"Let him lead," Jimmie Dunn whispered to Tom as they followed. "Give him every chance."

They walked along silently, each man admiring the unfaltering manner in which the boy picked his course. A Northern swamp is as baffling a tract to traverse as one can find. Each hundred yards is like any other hundred yards of any other swamp.

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Spruce trees of uniform size grow thickly. Between them younger brothers push forward upward. Old trees, losing in the fierce struggle for light above and nourishment underneath, victims in their weakness of the strong southwest winds, lie prone or sway at all angles because the thick growth will not permit them to fall to the ground.

Beneath all is the muskeg, the hummocky green moss, rising in flat knolls and dropping into sink-holes. Rotted tree-trunks, moss-covered, sink beneath the feet like feather pillows, and the moss itself gives the sensation of walking on a huge feather bed.

The land lies perfectly level, the growth is so thick that seventy-five yards is the limit of vision, and, unless the sun shines, there are no means of knowing directions. Men have wandered many hours in such swamps which are no more than half a mile across, and even on a bright day there is a depressing gloominess in these thick, damp tracts that cover so much of the North country.

Glancing occasionally over his shoulder at the sun, leaping from one mound to another, swinging his legs over windfalls, picking the clearest way through the dense growth, Jimmie Lad kept on toward the north.

"Thought you climbed a ridge to see this lake," said Tom after fifteen minutes.

"That was on the other side of the first lake," answered the boy. "The cabin is on a little muskeg pond beyond that. When I came back the second day I kept around the end of the ridge and the second lake like I'm going now. It's the shorter."

Once he hesitated when he came to a treeless stretch, an open bit of muskeg, but after a moment's thought he swung to the left, struck a broad, deep moose runway and hurried northward upon it.

"Just a little ways now," he called over his shoulder.

"The young devil's right," whispered Tom admiringly. "I remember the lake well enough, and it's just ahead, one of those little muskeg ponds, you know."

Jimmie Lad, who had begun to walk more rapidly, suddenly stopped and pointed. Through the trees the men could catch a glimpse of water and another fifty yards brought them to the last fringe of brush.

"This is the lake?" asked Tom.

"Yes. It's the one. Now we'll walk around until we strike this trail and then we'll go straight right up to the cabin."

He left the moose runway and pushed aside the brush, bending low, stopping occasionally to peer out at the little pond that lay before him.

"It's the lake, all right," he exclaimed excitedly. "We'll find the trail on the other side."

His confidence and his eagerness infected both men and they followed closely at his heels. Once when Tom stepped on a fallen limb and it snapped the boy turned accusingly and the woodsman mumbled a pleading excuse for his carelessness.

The sun had been at their backs when they reached the lake. After half a mile of travel it was straight across the water from them. Jimmie Lad stopped once and looked out across the pond, then continued confidently. A little later he stopped again and searched the ground nearer the lake. He went on more slowly. At last they were on the east side of the lake, returning to the point where they had started, and still there was no sign of a trail or the spring.

The eagerness and excitement gradually vanished from the boy's face. He stopped often, looked about him in evident bewilderment. Tom, who had been watching him keenly, concluded that he had made the boy sufficiently uncomfortable and then called them all to a standstill.

"It's right here," he began, "that the other cabin is that I told you about. See if it isn't the one you are looking for."

He turned and disappeared in a thicket of poplar and black alder which mark so many of the old clearings in the north woods. The others followed and found him standing beside a trapper's ruined shack. Everything about it proclaimed it to be an abandoned cabin and Jimmie Dunn, looking at it, wondered how Jimmie Lad with his clear powers of perception could ever have imagined it to be occupied and so spun such a fanciful tale about it.

Jimmie Lad, however, hardly gave it a glance before he turned to the others.

"This isn't it. I'd know no one lived here. We must have passed the one I saw. It was on the north side of the lake."

He turned back and the men followed. They started at once to make another circle. Not a word was spoken until they were again on the south side.

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"We've been around twice," said Tom, 'and we haven't even crossed a trail."

"Sure this is the lake?" asked Jimmie Dunn.

"I was sure. It is the same. Let's go back and look again."

The boy's abrupt dismissal of the possibility of the ruined trapper's cabin being the same that he had seen, his confident belief that he had seen a cabin on the lake, compelled credence in the two men. They searched even more carefully than the boy, but at last they were back where they had started, and there was no sign of anything except a long-unused moose runway on the west side.

Jimmie Lad stopped and faced the men. His gaze wavered for a moment. He winked his eyes vigorously. Then he stiffened, looked straight at one and then the other.

"I made a mistake," he said steadily. "We might as well go back to the canoe."

He turned quickly away from the lake into the thick swamp. Jimmie Dunn and Tom Gill followed silently, each with a queer ache in his heart. Neither spoke in the hour spent beneath the gloomy spruce trees. When they had reached the canoe they set it afloat and paddled away. After a while Tom and Jimmie Dunn began to talk of the preserve, the game, the menace of the wolves, the migrations of the moose from their Summer to their Winter feeding grounds.

Their conversation was disjointed, forced. Not once did they mention Doctor Rakow or anything connected with the subject which had filled their minds for the three days. Only seldom did they glance at the bent, silent figure in the bow.

CHAPTER VII

UNEXPECTED LIGHT ON THE MYSTERY

NOT until they had returned to the clubhouse and cooked and eaten their supper did Jimmie Lad speak.

"I guess you two think I'm a fool," he said when the men were washing the dishes. "I was sure I saw that cabin and just as sure I saw Rakow go into it."

"Of course," answered Jimmie Dunn quickly, for the boy's distress had not hurt so much as the manly way in which he had at last admitted he was in the wrong. "You can see lots of things in the bush. My trouble is in hearing. I am sure there is a band playing not far away when I hear the wind in the trees."

"Band!" exclaimed Tom. "That's funny. I'm always sure it's a Sunday-school picnic like I used to go to when I was a lad back East. I can hear the youngsters talking and calling and laughing so plain it stops me up even now.

"The bush is sure a funny place, especially when you are in it all alone, and it's worse for those who haven't been in it very long. I mind once I was guiding a man from the States, back in the country around Georgian Bay. Every black stump or rock was a moose, and every red-maple bush was a deer. He wasted a lot of cartridges on them, and he scared out all the real game in the country."

Both men related instance after instance from their long experience in the wilderness in a studied effort to relieve Jimmie Lad from his shame and embarrassment. But, as is so often the case with adults, they overdid it, and in a few minutes the boy announced that he was going to bed.

"Too much imagination," said Tom when they were alone.

"He never lied intentionally," asserted Jimmie Dunn with a certain amount of defiance.

"Of course not. He's not that kind, and if he had he never would have been so willing to lead us to the lake. He just got to dreaming it all."

The fiasco of the secret cabin had done much to rob the Rakow problem of its mystery and interest. In the light of Jimmie Lad's failure to find the place where he had seen the print of the boy's foot and heard a boy yelling across the lake, all their suspicions seemed a little absurd. As they sat on the screened porch and smoked, Jimmie Dunn rather admitted this to Tom Gill, who, because he had always been unconvinced, was assuming a rather superior attitude.

"Doesn't leave us much to do now that the cabin has failed to materialize," said Jimmie Dunn at last. "Still, I don't think it would be a bad idea to watch Rakow's movements. There is the shirt to explain and Mrs. Rakow's last words to me. And the half-witted boy getting in with that poacher and being the possessor of that money is a bit thin. I'll watch around a

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bit while I am here just to assure myself that everything is all right. But we won't take you on any more wild-goose chases unless you haven't anything else to do. What had you planned for tomorrow?"

"There is a bunch of supplies and the mail down on Crane Lake in the storehouse that ought to be brought up. We're about out of some things."

"We'll go down with you in the morning and help pack," offered Jimmie Dunn, and they went to bed.

Jimmie Lad did not appear until breakfast was nearly over. He came into the kitchen silently, and when he sat down to the table he avoided the men's eyes.

"I'm going down to the storehouse with Tom today," Jimmie Dunn said. "There are some supplies to be brought up and the mail will be there. I shouldn't wonder but that there will be a letter from your father. Want to come along?"

"I'd rather not, Uncle Jimmie," was the reply. "I'm sort of tired and would rather hang around here today."

Jimmie Dunn was about to press the matter when he received a warning glance from Tom.

"He wants to be alone for a day or two," the woodsman explained when they had started. "Like a kid, he's all upset about this secret-cabin business and he don't feel comfortable with us. He'll be over it in a day or two."

Jimmie Dunn did not answer. He loved the boy, wanted to be with him as much as possible, and he wished he had remained at the club-house.

"I guess it's all right," he said, after they had paddled a few miles. "Being alone perhaps is the best thing for him."

"Yes, and he's tired, too," said Tom. "He's been doing a lot of traveling and been up late nights for some time now."

The members of the preserve corporation had an arrangement with two men at the railroad whereby all supplies and mail were paddled out to a storehouse ten miles south of the club-house once each month. Tom Gill could get them there without losing too much time from his patrol work. Because of the activities in connection with the poacher and Rakow, he was ten days behind time.

"How does Rakow get mail out every week?" asked Jimmie Dunn when the canoe was loaded for the homeward journey.

"It comes out every month with ours and the other three weeks he hires a half-breed to bring it as far as the storehouse and take his mail out. Then the half-wit comes down here and gets it. Only when I make my monthly trip I take it as far as the club-house."

"Most of this bundle is Rakow's, I see. I'll tuck it in here." And Jimmie thrust the old flour-sack which contained the package of papers, letters and packages into an opening between a heavy pack and the side of the canoe.

The men were tired when they arrived at the club-house after sunset. There had been much packing on the portages and the big canoe was heavily loaded. Jimmie Dunn, though fresh from the city, had stood up under the work almost as well as Tom Gill. This was due as much to his mental attitude as to his physical condition.

There was something more fascinating to Jimmie Dunn about these vacations than he would have admitted. It had been years since he and Tom Gill and Marshall Wells had toiled together in the Barren Grounds, but the memory of it was very dear to him. Since that time when Jimmie Lad was a baby and Marshall Wells had left the young wife and son to go in search of his friend, Jimmie Dunn had never gone off alone.

He had remained at home, first because Marshall would not leave his wife, and then later that he might help his friend bring up the motherless boy. But always he had kept himself warm with the thought that some time, when Jimmie Lad was old enough, they four should go again into that country of unending toil but equally compelling fascination.

In the meantime he had adventured in spirit and, toiling there on the portages with Tom Gill, with whom he had shared so many of the hazards of the North country, he lived over the memory of the days of his exploring ventures. He had never said this aloud to the old woodsman, but Tom Gill, too, felt it, and as their eyes met over the packs there would come to them often that warm glow of friendship known only to men who have met danger and hardship together.

Once the feeling was so strong that Jimmie found speech necessary.

"By George!" he broke out suddenly. "I wish old Marsh could be here. He's

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missed a lot. But some day it's all four of us for the North country. Think of the things before the lad that he doesn't even dream of."

THEY were weary when they reached home that night.

"I was in hopes the kid would have supper going," grumbled Tom when they drew up in front of the club-house, "but there isn't even a fire."

They pulled up the canoe and left the unloading until later.

"Oh, Jimmie!" called Jimmie Dunn as they walked up to the silent building.

"That little canoe is gone," commented Tom, who had stopped and looked back at the dock.

Jimmie Dunn hurried into the building, slightly anxious. The place was silent, empty. He called again, knocked on the door to Jimmie's room, then opened it. There was no sign of the boy. Then Tom, who had gone into the kitchen and lighted a lamp, called to him—

"Here's a note from the lad."

"What does he say?"

Jimmie Dunn reached for the piece of paper which Tom had found impaled upon the kitchen table with a steel fork. It read:

I know there was a cabin on that muskeg lake just as sure as I know there is a club-house on this one. I'm going back and look for it until I find it. I have taken blankets, a tent and some grub and probably won't be back tonight. If I find it I'm going to keep watch for a day or two and see if Rakow comes again and if there are any kids there. Uncle Jimmie said himself that I was a member of the corporation and so it's my duty to see that no crime is committed there.

Yours very truly,
JAMES DUNN WELLS.

"The little son-of-a-gun!" exclaimed Tom admiringly. "He's just like his dad, that lad. He sets his mind on a thing and he sees it through clear to the end."

"I think he was more deeply hurt than we suspected," said Jimmie Dunn. "Poor little cuss. He couldn't stand having us think he lied or just dreamed he saw all that he told us he had, and he's gone back into that swamp to prove he's right."

"Won't any harm come to him," reassured Tom, who had detected an anxious note in his friend's voice. "He can handle himself in the swamp all right. He seems to take to the bush just natural. His dad, I guess."

"That's it. His dad. His dad is in Russia and I'm responsible for that boy. And we don't know yet that Rakow's operations are legitimate. Anyhow, you know yourself, Tom, a man has no business wandering about in the bush alone by himself, let alone a boy."

"You're getting old, Jimmie. But if you feel that way we'll run up there in the morning and find him."

They cooked and ate supper and then went down to the canoe to carry the supplies to the club-house. Each had made several trips with a load when Tom, who had been groping about in the darkness, asked—

"Did you take up the mail, Jimmie?"

"No. It must be in the bottom of the canoe."

"But it isn't."

They searched together, but the bundle was not to be found.

"We couldn't have lost it out, for I wedged it in," said Jimmie Dunn.

"Maybe we jerked it out when we unloaded and it fell into the water," suggested Tom as he walked down the beach. "What's that white thing out there?"

He set the canoe afloat and poled out from shore a few yards.

"Soaked!" he called as he lifted the dripping white bag from the water. "Now the doctor will be sore."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn as he took the sodden mass and started toward the club-house. "We'll have to dry it as quickly as possible."

In the kitchen Tom built up a fire while Jimmie Dunn opened the bag and took out the newspapers, letters and express packages. He worked rapidly, spreading the mail out on the table.

"Letters all soaked open," he said. "There! I've rubbed the envelope clear off that one."

He picked up the typewritten enclosure and attempted to slip it back. As he worked a line stood out with startling distinctness and his unconscious reading of it caused him involuntarily to read it again:

the two children taken by you under an assumed name

Jimmie Dunn laid the letter down upon the table, spread a wet newspaper over it and pushed back his chair. For a moment

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he strode back and forth the length of the kitchen.

"Better hurry those things up," said Tom. "I've got a good fire going, and we can dry them in the oven."

"Look here, Tom!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn. "It's not right to read another man's mail. I never did such a thing, and I wouldn't, but——"

"You mean we might find out some of the things we've been suspecting?"

"I have found out one. Just now. I never even thought of such a thing as prying into Rakow's mail, but that envelope came off and one line, typewritten, hit me right square between the eyes. It was only a part of a sentence. It said, 'the two children taken by you under an assumed name.' "

"Two children! Then Jimmie Lad has been right all along!"

"But I read only part of a sentence. It might mean anything. The question is: have we the right, in view of all that we have suspected and know, to read the rest of that letter?"

"Right? Sure we have. And, besides, who's to know whether we do or not. It's open there. What's to hinder?"

Jimmie Dunn looked at Tom absently for a moment. He knew the woodsman, honorable as a man can be in his own world, set certain liberal constructions where expediency and fair play conflicted. Here was an opportunity, undoubtedly, to clear up the entire Rakow matter, to obtain a clue which would lead to a solution of the problem. Yet Jimmie Dunn hesitated.

"It wouldn't be right!" he exclaimed suddenly and with a note of finality.

"And it wouldn't be right to let Jimmie Lad walk into some trap or other if he should find what he is looking for," snorted Tom in disgust. "Where is the letter? I'll read it if you're too finicky to."

He lifted the wet newspapers until he found the letter Jimmie Dunn had covered up.

"IT JUST says, 'Dear Sir,' at the top," he began. "No date or address or name of the one it's written to. Here's what it says:

"'I am writing this on a machine in a typewriter shop, on plain paper. Am using your name only on the envelope. No date, no address, no signature. I am sure it is safe.

"'I am writing for your own good as well as mine. Some one has started a scandal about the home. The board demanded of me, as superintendent, a complete list of families which have obtained children. Reports of children being obtained by incompetent, unfit persons are being circulated. In the list of suspected cases are the two children taken by you under an assumed name. To hush this scandal, to stop it now and prevent disclosures, I must have from you at once references that can be investigated or are strong enough to stand by themselves. This must be done immediately.

"'I do not know your whereabouts and am sending this to the old address with the hope that it will reach you. If you are not in a position to furnish the necessary papers at once, I can arrange to do so for you without difficulty. It will take seven hundred and fifty dollars to swing it, however. If you can not send the references, send the money, bills, express, and I will attend to it for you.

"'Under the circumstances you will understand that I may have difficulty in furnishing you with another child. I can not do so at once and when I do, I shall have to ask you for a raise to a thousand dollars. That is only fair in view of the great danger of exposure that I run in going on with the arrangement at all.

"'You will recognize the necessity of haste, for this investigation may lead more deeply than I hope, and uncovering one thing may uncover all.' "

The two men looked at each other in amazement when Tom had finished.

"That's the great drawback to being a crook," said the woodsman. "You're always open to blackmail."

"Blackmail, yes. But, good God, Tom! Don't you see? A thousand dollars for a child! What fiendish purpose has he with them? I knew from Mrs. Rakow's manner that something devilish was going on."

"Well, I know he has a laboratory. I saw it and I saw a child's shirt at the end of a pair of tongs."

"God, man! We've been blind, criminally so. He's using those children to experiment with. The poor idiot, Semper, is the result of his work in the past. And this is an experiment that he could not

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carry on in town. There is no telling what he may be doing to them, what fearful disease he may be squirting into them with a syringe. It is the most devilish thing I ever heard of."

"Jimmie Lad!" interrupted Tom in sudden and wholly unusual excitement. "Lord, man! Jimmie Lad is walking right into the same thing!"

Jimmie Dunn reached at once for his hat and started toward the door.

"Hold on!" commanded Tom, grasping his shoulder. "Let's not go off half-cocked. If the boy did find the secret cabin he wouldn't walk right out into the open. He's careful enough to keep hid, and that's what he wanted to do. Anyway, we don't want to look for him. We want to get to Rakow first. That's the place to hit for. If we can get him he can't harm the boy."

"Come on, then," cried Jimmie Dunn. "We can get there soon after midnight."

"And have nothing to go by when we do get there. If there was this sort of letter in the doctor's mail there may be something else. We'll go through the bunch."

"But that boy, Tom! I can't stay here when anything may be happening to him."

"You know Jimmie well enough to know that if he finds this cabin he's going to keep hid and play detective. And nothing is going to happen to him tonight. And our best chance is to get Rakow before he has time to carry out any experiments. He's a smooth one, always has an explanation ready. We don't know anything more than what we have guessed. We ought to know all the facts we can get."

He turned over the wet papers and letters.

"Here's another," he said. "Read it. The flap's ungummed."

Jimmie Dunn took the envelope and then laid it on the table.

"Not that one," he said. "Not unless we have to. It's from his wife."

He laid it aside and began to run through the wet mass on the table.

"There are medical magazines, letters from chemical and bacteriological concerns, and two express packages," he summarized. "One package contains books. They might tell us his line. The other is from Honolulu, and there is a letter from the same place. It seems to be the only other piece of personal correspondence."

"Read it," said Tom.

The flap was loosened and Jimmie drew out the enclosure and read it aloud.

"'Dear Doctor Rakow:

"'I am sending by the next steamship an express package containing the cultures obtained from the nodules of nodular leprosy. It is with greatly diverse emotions that I do so. I can not but regret that a man of your ability and knowledge should sacrifice himself, even on the altar of science, by risking inoculation with the germs of this loathsome disease, and at the same time I am filled with pride in knowing that a fellow investigator is willing to submit to such an unthinkable fate for the benefit of mankind.

"'For, although you maintain that your hope is to lay this great gift before your people and so relieve them from a disease that is becoming the scourge of southeastern Europe, all mankind will have cause to be grateful to you and revere your memory. Still, I can not determine whether I would rather wish you the success you seek or failure and a long life.'"

"Do you think—" began Tom uncertainly when Jimmie Dunn had finished reading and stood staring at him.

"Think!" fairly roared Jimmie. "We don't have to think. We know now. The hound! This is the most diabolical thing I ever heard of. It means that he has stolen those children from an orphan asylum and is going to inoculate them with leprosy. Sacrifice himself! The beast! He's not risking a thing, but he is giving those innocent, outcast youngsters the most loathsome disease in the world."

CHAPTER VIII

THE THIRD BOY

IN HIS rage he strode to the table and began to rip the cover from the express package from Honolulu.

"Take the lid off that stove!" he commanded fiercely when he found a small wooden box beneath many folds of paper. "Here is one instrument of hell he'll never use." And he dropped the parcel into the roaring pine flames.

"Then you think there is a secret cabin with kids in it?" asked Tom.

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"Think! There is no doubt of it. Jimmie Lad saw it, saw Rakow enter it. I understand the whole thing now, everything. I remember reading an article on the lepers of Molokai not long ago. There has been no cure for the disease because it is one of two diseases with which scientists have failed to inoculate the lower animals and obtain a serum. You can experiment with guinea-pigs and rabbits in studying other diseases, but not leprosy. Only a human being is susceptible, a fact which has formed an insurmountable bar to antitoxin research.

"This man, with the blood and the viewpoint of a snake, has conceived the idea of isolating himself up here in the bush, stealing these innocent children and experimenting with them. No one suspected they were here and it means nothing to him if they are worse than murdered.

"Because he knew the risks he ran he cooked up that scheme with Ed Benton, insisted upon having a corner of the preserve to himself, and— Why, everything points to it! The boy Jimmie heard! That shirt you saw him carrying with the tongs! It's conclusive."

"And the —— skunk wanted to get hold of a third kiddie to work on!"

Tom spit out the words with an abhorrent grimace.

"Jimmie Lad!" cried Jimmie Dunn. "The third one! The one he wants! Tom! He'll make a leper of him before we can get there!"

Again he rushed toward the door, and again the woodsman held him back.

"Easy, lad," he advised gently. "We've got time. Rakow is no fool. He planned all this mighty careful and he isn't going to make any moves until he is sure of his ground. You can bet on it that if he gets hold of the boy he'll go slow."

"I tell you, a man who has gone as far as he has won't stop at anything. Besides, if Jimmie Lad gets into that cabin his mere being there may give him the disease. A scratched finger, a black-fly bite, and the germs with which that pest-house must be filled, and the result is the same as if Rakow had used a syringe on him."

"That's true enough. But if we are going to get the boy we must use our heads as well as our heels. Now, I can get to Rakow's place by daylight."

"Hang Rakow's place! We've got to find that boy before he gets near that pest-house."

"All right, and you can do it. You go and get on the lad's trail. I'll go to Rakow's place. That will give us two chances instead of one. Here's what I'll do. I'll go there and tell him I've had a letter from you in Chicago saying the other members understand he is building cabins all through the bush and driving moose out of good feeding-grounds and outside the preserve, and that you want a report on it. That will give him a chance to take me to this hidden cabin, and if he doesn't do it that way he will at the point of a gun. You can sit right down now and write the letter for me.

"You see, with that as an excuse I can see things peaceful, and see more than if I dropped down on him asking where those kids are. That way I can get Rakow and maybe get an idea where the cabin is. A hidden cabin on an unknown lake in a swamp is a mighty hard thing to find."

"And that is why you have got to come with me," replied Jimmie Dunn doggedly. "I tell you, we must find Jimmie Lad. We must get there first. What will you and I ever tell Marsh if we let that youngster into this danger?"

"I guess," Tom began slowly in a voice that showed his feeling as Jimmie Dunn never remembered it to have done before, "that you and me don't have to tell Marsh Wells anything. He'll know and he'll know without us telling him that hell and high water wouldn't stand between us and the lad if he is in danger.

"Now don't get into one of your one-ideaed times. It may be all right when only yourself is in danger like that time you wouldn't know us when we went up into the Barren Grounds to find you. I kicked you then for that, but I'll tie you up if I have to to make you see things straight now."

It was what was needed to penetrate the panic that the discovery of the purpose of Roctor Rakow had brought to Jimmie Dunn. He looked at the woodsman for a moment while the memory of all the times that Tom Gill's sound sense had come to their aid in the Barren Grounds rushed over him.

"I guess you are right," he said quietly. "Tell me what you plan."

"Well, I'll go over and see Rakow. He

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thinks I am a simple fool who lives in the woods and he is just smooth enough to show me this cabin and give some foxy explanation. While I do that you go and see if you can't find it yourself. That gives us two chances where with your plan we would only have one. You're just as good in the bush as I am.

"This much is sure. Jimmie Lad was right where I was wrong. I said there wasn't no such lake in that swamp. I had in mind the one he took us to. I don't know of any other near it. But he got mixed in his directions, I guess, and he did find another. You go north from where we landed to the next lake, and on the north side of that is a ridge. He says he saw his lake from there. You be on that ridge at daylight and you'll see it. Then get your bearings and go."

"And you think Rakow will lead you to it?" asked Jimmie Dunn scornfully.

"Either one way or the other," was the grim answer. "Now write that letter."

He brought paper and a pen and Jimmie Dunn sat down and began to write hurriedly.

"Ease up there, lad," advised Tom, who was reading over his shoulder. "Start over again and go slow. There's time. That sounds like what it really is."

Jimmie Dunn saw his mistake and began again. The product of ten minutes of studied effort was perfectly satisfactory to his critic, and when the letter was thoroughly dry Tom folded it, wiped it lightly across his muddy shoepacks and then rubbed it between his damp palms.

"That adds a little age to it," he said as he took his rifle down from its rack. "Ready?"

Jimmie Dunn reached for a weapon and they went out into the darkness together.

"Where and when will we meet?" he asked.

"If you go to the east end of the lake where the lad and I was camped when he first saw this cabin you'll find an old portage in the bay at the northeast corner. It's half a mile and will bring you out on a string of little lakes that follow through with short portages to the south side of the lake Rakow's place is on. If I get through first I'll wait for you there, and if not you wait for me."

"I know the route," answered Jimmie Dunn as he lifted his canoe into the water. "And don't let that man fool you, Tom."

"He'll not," was the grim answer, and in the darkness they paddled away, Tom across the lake, Jimmie Dunn to the west.

JIMMIE DUNN had spent enough time on the preserve to know the main waterways intimately and he had no difficulty in reaching his first objective before there were any signs of daylight. In the darkness he left his canoe and started north for the second lake which, he knew, was less than half a mile away. It had occurred to him to search for Jimmie Lad's canoe along the shore but his desire for speed decided against it.

He reached the second lake and followed the shore around to the north side, where the ridge rose from the water. In the first haze of the early Northern dawn he climbed the hill and looked across the swamp on the other side. A thin mist and the half darkness hid everything.

Because there was nothing else to do he sat down to wait for light to come. Finally he caught the first sheen of white against the dark forest, and he knew the lake of the secret cabin lay before him. It was maddening, where the lake was in sight, to realize that the swamp must be crossed before he could reach Jimmie Lad, but he was too much of a woodsman even at that moment to fight against the inevitable. Quickly he took his bearings and plunged down the hill.

A half-hour later he came out on the edge of a lake. Almost on a run he started around the shore. Every moment was precious if there were still time to reach the cabin before Jimmie Lad could enter its pestilent interior. Never in any journey in the Barren Grounds, when the lives of all three had depended upon his woodcraft, had Jimmie Dunn traveled with such apprehension lest a mistake in direction or a blunder in his judgment should bring defeat in his undertaking.

But finally, despite his absorption, familiar objects began to impress themselves, unconsciously at first and then later because he began to watch for them. But it was not until he had completed the circle of the pond that he finally gave in to the sickening realization that he had failed in his attempt, that he had found and encircled the same lake to which Jimmie Lad had led them.

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Further, though he had watched as he had never watched in the wilderness before, he had not been able to find the least indication of a trail, the building of a cabin or of the presence of a human being anywhere near the lake.

AT THE same moment Tom Gill rounded the point of the bay which hid Rakow's laboratory. He had expected the dog's warning but he was not prepared at that early hour for the almost immediate appearance of a white-suited figure at the door of the residence. As he paddled across to the beach he could see Rakow standing there. The scientist did not come down to the water as before, and Tom, who had scrutinized the entire place before landing, walked up to him.

"Another intrusion," said the doctor coldly. "I shall certainly report you to the officers of the preserve and demand your immediate dismissal. Now leave at once."

Tom coolly took the letter from his pocket and handed it to Rakow.

"It happens that the president of the preserve ordered me to come here," he said.

"Why did you select this hour of the morning?"

"It said to do it at once, and when Jimmie Dunn writes me to hurry I hurry."

Rakow leisurely opened the letter and read it.

"I see that you have been breaking the rules and invading my corner of the preserve," he said when he had finished.

"I have not. That's the first I knew of such a thing."

"Where did Mr. Dunn get this information?"

"You know as much about it now as I do."

"I can not understand why Mr. Dunn did not write directly to me. There is an insinuation in this that I do not like. However, since he has taken this course, I will comply. You will have full opportunity to report to him anything you may find. Then I'll take up the matter with him myself. These intrusions must cease, and I want you distinctly to understand that you are not to come here again under any circumstances."

"The scenery around here don't make any hit with me and you don't either," answered Tom belligerently. "Where is this cabin?"

Rakow looked at him sharply, was about to retort, and then stepped down from the door.

"There is a building," he said. "It is back in the swamp. I will show it to you and you can see for yourself that there is nothing about it which violates my agreement with the other members of the preserve or interferes with the supply of game. I must warn you, however," and he stopped and faced Tom, "that there is danger in going near it."

"Danger!" exclaimed the woodsman involuntarily, and he took a step backward. "How do you mean?"

"I'll tell you when I get there," and Rakow turned and went on, not looking to see if he were followed.

Had the scientist hoped to frighten Tom Gill he did not succeed. Tom never hesitated. He knew vaguely what leprosy was and he had that loathing for the very name which is common with all people. He had, too, that common impression that the mere sight of a leper might prove dangerous and the idea of visiting a building in which the diease was rampant filled him with horror.

But the heart of Tom Gill, lonely old woodsman since the days when he had romped back and forth across the Barren Grounds with Marshall Wells and Jimmie Dunn, reveling in the comradeship their common dangers and privations had brought, had opened to the son of his old friend.

The month the boy had spent with him had wakened him from the stiffening effects of what was becoming a forlorn old age. The likeness to the father had been enough in itself to arouse a great affection for Jimmie Lad, while the boy himself had strengthened the attachment.

Now the thought of him, possibly a prisoner in this pest-house, aroused the woodsman to the fighting point. He strode forward quickly, aggressively, and followed closely at the heels of the scientist.

Rakow led the way straight west down a gentle slope into the swamp and along a trail upon which much wood had been hauled during the Winter. The first hundred yards Tom's anger blinded him to the real object of his journey. Then he began to look about, to watch the trail,

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look for signs of Jimmie Lad or of the two children he knew were somewhere near.

But the trail bore only the footprints of the doctor's canvas shoes and of Semper Eadem's hobnails. The soft, damp, spongy earth would have taken and held the impress of anything else.

Moreover, the trail did not turn around the end of the bay toward the south but kept on into the swamp to the west. Once when it swerved slightly toward the north Tom realized that the lake Jimmie Lad had discovered was in reality in another part of the big swamp and he wondered how the boy could have reached it and returned.

Then a quick bend showed a small log building directly in front. It was in the depths of the swamp. No trail led from it. There was no sign of a lake. In fact, Tom knew there was none near, that this was not the hidden cabin.

"That is it," said the doctor as he stopped and faced about. "It is the only other building I have except those at the lake, the ones which you already know. I had this built at the same time as the others. There was no intention on my part to deceive the members of the preserve corporation. I simply wanted an isolated laboratory and built it. There is no reason in the world why any one should object. I am well within my limits and I in no way affect the game.

Tom stood looking about him. There was a small clearing from which the larger spruce had been cut for the building logs. The cabin was about sixteen by twenty feet in dimensions, with one window and a door on the nearest side.

"What's dangerous about that shack?" he asked casually.

"There is not much danger, and should anything happen you would never know it. One of the principal reasons for my coming here is the necessity for an isolated spot in which to conduct my experiments without endangering the lives of others. Can I have your confidence, my man?"

Tom stared as if without comprehension.

"If I tell you something will you agree to keep it to yourself? Will you promise not to tell even Mr. Dunn?"

"All right."

"Well, my great object in life is the perfection of an explosive more powerful by far than anything that has been dreamed of. I have worked on it for years. Many times I have come close to the goal, but always something has occurred. At last, in desperation, I thought of such a place as this. I was confident that, with an uninterrupted opportunity to work, I would succeed, and the selection of a place in which I would not endanger the lives of others was imperative.

"Success lies just before me. In that building now is a small amount of my compound powerful enough to make an immense pit of this entire swamp. My only fear is that a slight jar will set it off. That is why I said there is danger in coming here. Do you care to satisfy yourself further by seeing the interior?"

"Might as well," was the nonchalant answer.

RAKOW, with a slight show of impatience, turned toward the cabin. Tom saw that the window was darkened by a curtain.

"You will not see much," said the scientist as he produced a key and unlocked the door. "I am not only afraid of a jar but of the action of light as well. All my work has been conducted in half darkness. I will open the door just wide enough for you to see inside."

Tom held one eye to the crack. While he was unable to distinguish objects clearly he satisfied himself that the cabin sheltered no human being.

"I can't see anything," he said as he drew away.

"There is only a small laboratory equipment, two benches, a table and a chair," answered Rakow. "I am sorry I can not show you more but I am afraid to risk the light. Is there anything more?"

"This is the only building you've got except those on the lake?"

"I said that it was."

"Don't see anything about this that should stir up a row."

He walked around the cabin, looking for signs of children, but so far as he was able to learn the place was exactly as represented by the scientist. There were no indications even that it was used a great deal. The path to the door was only slightly worn. There were no windows except that near the door.

"No lake near here is there?" Tom asked when he rejoined Rakow.

"Not that I know of. I never leave the

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buildings. This is the farthest I have ever been from the main laboratory."

Rakow turned back to the bay and Tom followed. For a time the woodsman was frankly puzzled. The scientist's explanations were ready, plausible, and he was clearly borne out by what had been seen.

Then he remembered the letters they had found, the package they had burned, the completeness of the circumstantial evidence in their possession, and he became again only the determined searcher for Jimmie Lad.

As he walked back at Rakow's heels he kept a sharp watch for a trail leading off to the right, one that would penetrate the swamp in the direction in which the boy had said he had seen the hidden cabin. But they reached the lake without a trace of a path anywhere. Not even on the sand beach was there a footprint.

Tom was baffled. From the open-minded believer in only what was to be seen he had become, after the opening of the letters and the disappearance of Jimmie Lad, a firm believer in the complete villainy of Rakow. In the apparent willingness of the scientist to show everything he felt rather than detected a further evidence of guilt and his rage was intensified by the disconcerting fact that he still had nothing definite upon which to act. Even at that moment Jimmie Lad might be a prisoner, might even be a victim of this fiend's diabolical experiments.

"If he's got one hidden place, why not another?" he thought as he walked along the beach. "There is another, the one Jimmie Lad found and the one where he is now."

Rakow was following silently at his heels, evidently determined that this should be the last intrusion upon his privacy. That this was his thought became evident when he spoke.

"Remember," he said as Tom stopped beside his canoe, "that this is absolutely the last time I will countenance a visit to this place. I warn you. I can not be interrupted. If I can not be accorded the seclusion agreed upon I will use force to obtain my rights. Remember! The next time you come into this bay I will open fire with a rifle."

Tom turned slowly and looked Rakow over from head to foot. There was contempt in his glance, in his attitude. Then, without taking his eyes from Rakow's face, he stooped suddenly and grasped the barrel of his rifle.

"I won't find you here when I come back!" he said savagely. "You kid murderer! I'll put you where you won't do any more harm. Get into this canoe."

With the memory of the doctor's maniacal rage still vivid, Tom was amazed at the meekness with which the man began to comply with his demand. It was, of course, the common-sense thing to do, as Tom held a weapon and the doctor did not.

But Tom had not expected the common-sense behavior. And because it was unexpected it was also disarming. He bent over to lift the canoe. A sudden movement caused him to look up. As he did so he received full in the face from a small shining instrument fumes so overpowering, so blinding, he was helpless in his rush for his adversary.

A second later he was lying on the ground from one blow from the doctor's fist. He remained unconscious while Rakow summoned Semper and they bound his arms and legs and carried him into the house.

CHAPTER IX

JIMMIE LAD BECOMES AMBITIOUS

JIMMIE LAD watched Tom Gill and Jimmie Dunn paddle around the point a mile to the west and then ran up to the club-house. He no longer brooded. His eyes were no longer dull. The opportunity for which he had planned in the night, which had been afforded by the absence of the two men at the storehouse, had arrived. He would find that cabin by the lake, and this time he would learn what it was, what was in it, and make certain of its location.

He wrote the note, collected food, cooking utensils and dishes, blankets and a tent. He checked over everything to see that there was enough for two, and when he loaded the little canoe he placed an extra paddle beneath the thwarts.

So eager was he to reach the big swamp he paddled too vigorously in the first mile. But he did not stop to rest, only altered his pace and kept doggedly on.

Jimmie Lad, while lying awake the night before, had planned every detail of the day's work. He knew that he had seen

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the mysterious lake from the ridge north of the second lake. His mistake had been made in not climbing the ridge a second time instead of trusting to his sense of direction in the swamp. He knew that he had taken the two men to another muskeg pond, one so like the first he had not been able to distinguish, but that by following his first course he would again reach the secret cabin.

The determination of the youngster to vindicate himself, not only by finding the cabin but by proving that it was used by Rakow as a hiding-place for stolen children, was not the sole object of his journey. Simple vindication was not enough. He would show Tom Gill and Uncle Jimmie that he was not a dreamer, that he could not only make clever deductions but that he could act.

Once on the lake from which the overland start must be made, he carried his canoe back into the brush where it could not be seen. He stowed his supplies beneath it and then, with a rifle, started northward for the second lake. He had chosen the spot from which he had begun his first journey and followed a moose runway he remembered having used. Moose runways are all very much alike, especially in swamps, but he was certain of this when he saw a small cedar beside the trail, the trunk of which had been clawed by a bear.

The runway, as the sun told him, led far to the east instead of straight north, but he kept on until he reached the second lake. He kept to the east side, though he had taken Jimmie Dunn and Tom Gill around the other end, a mile farther west.

"That's where I went wrong," he muttered as he scrambled through the thick cedar growth along the shore. "I was mixed up that first day when there wasn't any sun, and when I came back I made a big circle to the west."

On the north side of the lake he began to climb the ridge and the first thing he saw from the summit was the secret muskeg pond. He was about to plunge down into the swamp when he looked to the west. A glint of blue told the story. Out in the center of the swamp and far to the west was another lake, the one to which he had taken the two men. The swamp had been too much for him.

He caught his bearings carefully, lined up the eastern lake and the ridge and the sun and then started out. He did not hurry, for he did not wish to make a mistake, and every hundred yards he stopped, looked at the sun, chose an objective and went on. In half an hour he saw water through the spruce ahead.

Instantly he became the woodsman of all boys' dreams. He crouched low, trailed his rifle, carefully thrust brush aside and worked slowly around to the other side of the lake. Every few yards he stopped and listened, peered through the brush and across the water.

There was not a sound, not a sign of any living thing. Jimmie Lad's ears were eager for a boy's cry but none came. The first indication he saw of the presence of human beings was the trail which led from the cabin to the spring near the lake. He paralleled it at once, proceeded more slowly and more cautiously than ever, and at last came out on the edge of the clearing.

For a time he waited. No one appeared. There was no sound. Curtains at the windows were drawn. No smoke came from the chimney. As he lay on the damp moss his heart pounded fiercely and in the silence of the swamp he could hear it plainly. He contracted his chest in an effort to still what he feared was a sound that would be plainly audible a hundred yards away. He breathed deeply, his lungs demanding air as if he had been running for a long time. Every nerve was strung. The sudden chatter of a squirrel caused him to start and tremble.

None of this was due to fear. Jimmie Lad felt absolutely safe. He was well hidden, his presence was not suspected, and he was armed with a weapon he could use. But he was excited, excited as he had never been before. He was watching the hidden fortress of a band of desperate criminals. He was gaining information which would lead to the arrest of the gang, the freeing of innocent children, to a distinction which would arouse the utmost envy among his boy friends.

Despite his excitement and the romantic emotions which swayed him, Jimmie Lad was still able to think with his usual clearness. He had come solely with the intention of finding the secret cabin, of spying upon it for a day or two, and later of leading Jimmie Dunn and Tom Gill to it.

Now, as he lay there watching, a dazzling idea came to him. Why not rescue these

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stolen children? Why not free them from the cabin, lead them through the swamp and paddle them to the club-house?

The dramatic possibilities of such a feat intoxicated him. Instantly and vividly he pictured every step of the plan, the cautious, quiet retreat through the swamp, his assurances to the frightened children that they "were among friends," the manner in which he would subjugate them by his displays of woodcraft and canoemanship, and, finally, the grand entrance at the club-house.

"Who are these children?" Jimmie Dunn would ask in amazement.

"Oh, they're those kids Rakow kidnaped," would be the nonchalant answer. "What are the chances for something to eat, Tom?"

Instantly Jimmie Lad was in motion. He squirmed through the swamp until he could circle the cabin and see it from the other side. First of all he must know whether the door was locked. Half an hour later, so careful had been his movements, he looked out from the brush less than fifty yards from the front of the building. His heart leaped when he saw that there was only an ordinary latch on the door. The next moment he heard the unmistakable sound of a bench grating upon the floor of the cabin.

"They're there," he thought. "Now there's only the job of getting them out."

He looked up the trail which led, he believed, to Rakow's place, for he must not be seen. No one was in sight. He squirmed forward, was about to rise to his feet, when something white flashed against the dark trees of the swamp. Instantly he flattened out and crept backward. When again he dared look he saw the white-clad figure of the king of kidnapers coming down the trail.

IT WAS the first time the boy had been so near to the mysterious Rakow. He watched the man closely, but with a sinking heart. Here was no bearded villain. There was no crafty look in the eyes, no evil twist in the mouth, no hardened visage. He was altogether like men Jimmie Lad had seen in Chicago, much like his father's friends.

But his conviction that Rakow was the kidnaper would not down. That face only masked his black thoughts, his fiendish planning. So convinced had the boy become, for him there could be no doubt but that the kidnaper stood before him.

As Jimmie Lad watched Rakow stopped before the door and opened it. He did not go in at first but looked into the dark interior and spoke. Instantly two boys, each about fourteen years old, appeared at the door. They stood there silently, their heads down, evidently in terror. One answered in a low tone and then at Rakow's command they stepped back and he entered the cabin and closed the door.

"These poor little cusses," muttered Jimmie Lad. "They're scared to death of him. And no wonder he don't have to keep the door locked. Those kids would get lost if they went out of sight of the cabin. He's got them where they can't get away."

The observation brought another blinding flash of inspiration. For a moment the boy trembled as it swept over him. It was more daring, more dazzling, than anything he had ever thought of before. Then as he became more calm he crept back into the thick growth and disappeared in the depths of the swamp.

The first thing Jimmie Lad did was to pick out an unmistakable landmark and hide his rifle. Then he walked straight north parallel to the trail for two hundred yards before turning toward it. After watching a moment he dashed across into the brush beyond, being careful not to leave a footprint in the trail itself. Then he found a place where he could see down the path toward the cabin and waited.

In ten minutes Rakow's white suit flashed through the trees. His heart thumping wildly, a queer, creeping sensation spreading over his entire body, but with resolution nevertheless, Jimmie Lad started through the swamp. He crashed into brush, thrust it noisily aside, going toward Rakow but still some distance from the trail.

"Who is that?" came a sharp voice.

"Hello!" cried Jimmie Lad excitedly. "Hello! Hello!"

He ran to the trail and sprang out upon it only a few feet from the scientist.

"Who are you?" demanded Rakow.

He was looking the boy over closely, his black eyes taking in every detail.

"I'm lost," answered Jimmie Lad. "Do you live near here?"

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"Lost! How did that happen?"

"I ran away to be a trapper and I haven't had anything to eat today."

"Where are your parents?"

"In Boston."

"When did you leave?"

"About two weeks ago."

"How do you happen to be here?"

"That's what I don't know. I got off the C. P. R. at a little place and bought a canoe and some grub and started out to find a place to trap next Winter. Yesterday when I stopped at noon my canoe drifted off with everything in it. The wind blew it right across the lake."

"Why didn't you walk around and get it again?"

"I started to but it caught on an island. The wind drove it clear up on a sand beach and it stayed there."

"Then you came here?"

"Well, I started to walk back to the railroad but I got all mixed up in the woods and just now I saw your white clothes through the trees and started for you. I am awfully hungry. I ain't had anything to eat since yesterday."

Rakow still surveyed Jimmie Lad coldly. No pity seemed to have been aroused by the story. He looked at the swollen and blood-stained neck and face of the boy, for Jimmie Lad had suffered mosquitoes and black flies to have their own way while he lay watching the cabin. He looked at the khaki trousers which, while evidently new, were torn in places and splattered with swamp mud.

"Do your parents know where you are?" he asked suddenly.

"They think I went up into Maine and have been looking for me there," Jimmie Lad answered readily.

"How do you know that?"

"I've been reading it in the papers."

"Then a search was made for you?"

"I should say there was," was the proud answer, for Jimmie Lad was now thoroughly in the rôle, acting it naturally because his imagination was so vivid it was convincing to himself. "The governor is spending money like water, but it'll never do him any good."

"Why not?"

"I fooled them at the start. I wrote letters to a guide in Maine and got letters from him, and I left books and magazines about Maine in my room, and I talked about it all the time, and I started in that direction, as far as Concord, New Hampshire.

"Then I turned south again at night on a freight-train and got to Buffalo and hid on an ore boat. The captain was good to me and let me off at Port Arthur and I took the train there until I got to the place where I bought the canoe.

"The last thing I did on the train was to buy a paper and it said they haven't found a trace of me since I got to Concord and think I'm dead. My mother's awful sick and the governor's near crazy, the paper said, and the police have given me up."

"Where do your parents live?"

"In Boston, I said."

"Yes, but what is the address?"

Jimmie Lad drew back and looked fearfully at Rakow.

"Mister, you won't tell on me, will you? I don't want to go back. I want to be a trapper and live here in the woods. They'll never find me if you keep quiet and I don't want to go back to Boston."

"What does your father do?"

"Nothing much. You see, he doesn't have to work. He's got lots of money and I guess he'd give a lot of it to find me."

JIMMIE LAD glanced hopefully at Rakow as he made this suggestion, but the doctor was looking thoughtfully at the trail and tamping down a bit of earth with one foot.

"You are sure they won't get trace of you?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, I know they won't. They haven't any idea I came West, and the way I traveled there's too many places where they can't track me. I fooled them, all right."

"What is your name?"

Jimmie Lad hesitated.

"Come, come!" said Rakow impatiently. "You might as well tell it. It would be an easy matter for me to find out by reading the papers."

"It's Reginald Wright Osborne, sir."

"American?"

"Of course. My ancestors came over in the *Mayflower*."

Rakow's eyes gleamed with their first show of interest.

"Always lived in Boston, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. One of my ancestors was a

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general in the Revolutionary War and lots of them have been governors and congressmen and ambassadors."

"Do you know of what diseases your grandparents died?"

"Died! They're not dead! Grandfather Osborne is more'n seventy and he goes trout-fishing up in New Brunswick every year. He won't die for a long time yet."

"How would you like to live here with me? asked Rakow suddenly.

"Are you a trapper?"

"No, but there is a lot of game around here to be trapped and shot. You could learn all about it while you lived in my house."

"Do you mean that?" asked Jimmie excitedly.

"Of course. Come with me and I'll get you something to eat. I have had luncheon but I am sure there is something left."

Jimmie Lad had confidently expected that he would be taken to the cabin in which he had seen the two boys, but Rakow turned up the trail toward the north. The youngster hesitated, confronted with the possibilities of his suddenly conceived plan.

He had believed that the kidnaper, for this was the only term he now had for the scientist, would jump at this ready-made child-theft and lock him up immediately in the hidden cabin, from which the boy knew he could easily escape. He did not consider for an instant that he might be taken to the main buildings on the big lake. That would mean that he would be seen by Semper Eadem and recognized.

For an instant Jimmie Lad debated whether he would dash off into the brush. He knew he could outrun Rakow and that there was no danger of being fired upon. But such a step, he realized, would instantly place the arch-kidnaper upon his guard, prevent the rescue of the stolen boys and ruin his chances for a triumphant return to the club-house.

Fear made the decision, however, and he was about to run when Rakow turned and looked at him.

"This way," he said sharply.

The dark eyes, the stern expression and the command settled the question. Jimmie Lad followed silently, obediently, in an increasing terror. He did not even see that at last the trail ended, not at the mysterious laboratory, but on the bank of a small creek.

"Get in there," said Rakow, pointing to a canoe.

THE boy took the place indicated in the bow and sat there motionless while the doctor poled the craft around the numerous bends until they emerged in open water. On the other side, beneath a ridge, were two large log buildings. Jimmie Lad recognized them instantly from Tom Gill's description.

But the buildings held nothing of interest for the boy. On the beach and evidently waiting for them stood the half-witted servant, the one factor in his plan he had not considered. Here he was about to enter the robber-baron's retreat, about to permit Rakow himself to supply the evidence that would result in his own conviction, only there would be no evidence, no conviction, no Jimmie Lad.

On the beach there before him the end would come. One word from Semper and Rakow would know all, undoubtedly would kill him immediately and cast his stone-weighted body into the depths of the bay.

Terror gripped him, a terror which increased as he saw Semper Eadem looking at him so closely. His mind groped for means of escape. He might turn over the canoe and swim ashore. He might attack Rakow with a paddle, taking a chance on getting in the first blow, stunning the kidnaper and paddling away with him bound in the canoe.

But whatever ideas came vaguely to his mind he was unable to act upon them. His hands gripped the gunwales and he felt that he could not tear them away. Straight toward his fate he went, powerless to avert it.

The canoe touched the beach. The half-wit stood before it, staring at Jimmie Lad without any sign of recognition.

"Semper," commanded Rakow, "take this boy up to the house and get him something to eat. Then don't go away."

Semper turned at once toward the residence and Jimmie Lad, powerless to do otherwise, followed him into the house.

"Hungry?"

Semper asked the question with reassuring good-nature.

"No," gasped Jimmie Lad, and then at a glimpse of Rakow through the door he

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stammered: "Yes, I am. I haven't had anything to eat all day."

Rakow did not stop at the residence but went on up to the laboratory. Jimmie Lad watched him through a window while Semper opened a cupboard and began to set food upon the table. When the meal was ready he called Jimmie Lad and then left the room.

It was with difficulty that the boy could eat anything at first. The excitement and his fear of being recognized had robbed him of his appetite. When he began to reason that the half-witted servant did not remember ever having seen him his terror diminished and, because he was a healthy boy and had not eaten since morning, he finally disposed of a meal that would have convinced Rakow of the truth of the story told in the swamp.

When he had finished he arose and walked to the door. An absorbing interest in the Rakow establishment began to possess him, but from his position he could not see anything except the slope leading down to the bay. Jimmie Lad was about to step out when he saw Rakow himself at the beach.

The doctor was walking up from the canoe in which he and the boy had crossed the bay. His actions were puzzling for a moment, and then Jimmie Lad realized what he was doing. He was eliminating all traces of his visitor's footprints in the sand and in the trail to the residence.

Jimmie Lad drew back and watched through the window. At last the scientist reached the door, but he did not come in.

"I want you to understand," he announced when he saw the boy, "that I am engaged in experiments with a new and dangerous explosive. Because of this I can not have you wandering about the place and must insist that you remain in this building the remainder of the afternoon. Tomorrow I will take you to a cabin I have built some distance away, and that will be your home. Then you will be safe and can begin your trapping operations. But," and he spoke sternly, "remember! Do not, under any circumstances, leave this building. Do not even step outside."

Jimmie Lad mumbled that he understood what was meant and withdrew to a corner of the room. He immediately lost the assurance regained when Semper had failed to recognize him. No dazzling thoughts of a triumphant rescue of the stolen children or of the conviction of the kidnaper could give him back his old confidence.

This man had offered no violence, and yet his very presence inspired a vague, disquieting fear. A good, red-blooded villain Jimmie Lad might have understood. He might even have thrilled at his daring and his black-heartedness. But this cold, unemotional individual, who seemed to Jimmie Lad unlike any one he had ever met before, filled him with a nameless terror. He thought longingly of the clubhouse, of Jimmie Dunn and of Tom Gill, and was staggered by the rashness which had placed him so thoroughly in the power of one whose villainy he could not even understand.

Rakow turned away and went through the trees to his laboratory. But the fear of him remained. Jimmie Lad knew he was a prisoner, that the story he had told had decided his fate. He would be closely guarded, his escape would be prevented, until Rakow had run down his story. Then...

He sank limply into a chair at the thought of what would happen. In his terror he visualized the entire scene. The kidnaper, foiled, fearful of exposure, suspecting a trick, confronting him with the truth. A knife at his throat, a rock tied about his neck and the splash of his body as it sank into the depths of the bay.

His father would never know. Jimmie Dunn would never know. Tom Gill would never know. They would search the woods, perhaps Rakow's place. But nothing would show that he had ever been there. Rakow had wiped out his footprints in the sand. He was making it impossible for him to leave others. In the blackness of his despair the boy buried his head in his arms on the kitchen table and cried uncontrollably.

CHAPTER X

JIMMIE LAD OVERREACHES

HAD Tom Gill been watching Jimmie Lad from a hiding-place in Rakow's residence his heart would have ached in a strange, uncomfortable manner and his eyes would have been clouded with an unfamiliar mist.

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"He's got all of his dad in him, that youngster!" he would have muttered proudly. "It takes something more than Rakow's sort to down him."

For, the first spasm of terror and hopelessness past, Jimmie Lad began to plan. Of course he would be killed if he sat there and let Rakow kill him. Of course he would be a prisoner if he did not try to escape. With a glow of pride he remembered that he had fooled the kidnaper once. Why not do it again?

Boys often dream of such situations, often imagine themselves in such predicaments. Here was the real thing. Think of the distinction that would be his if, after placing himself in the power of this arch-criminal, he should escape and be the means of frustrating all the carefully laid plans.

Jimmie Lad arose and went to the window. No one was in sight. Across the bay he could distinguish the opening of the little creek by which Rakow had come from the secret cabin in the swamp. The cleverness of the idea struck him at once. At any time Rakow or Semper could visit the hidden cabin and never leave a trace of the path to it. Not a trail, not a footprint, not a hint of such a place.

Jimmie Lad studied the shore. The swamp at the end of the bay came down to the water. The edge of it lay within one hundred yards of the residence. Once within its depths he could never be caught. He had seen Rakow's spotless white shoes and clothing, had noted the clumsy manner in which he had handled a canoe, and he had a contempt for the man's woodcraft.

That it would be folly to make a dash for the swamp at that time the boy recognized after a reconnaissance from the windows on the other sides of the cabin. He saw Semper splitting wood to the west and he caught a glimpse of the white suit of Rakow at a window in the laboratory. One at least must be out of the way before he attempted to escape.

The afternoon dragged on. Rakow remained in the laboratory, Semper continued the monotonous splitting of pine blocks until half-past four. Then he laid aside his ax and came into the residence.

"Hungry again?" he asked as he began to build a fire in the kitchen stove.

"Beginning to be, a little," admitted Jimmie Lad.

The half-wit was loquacious. He was a big fellow, strong and hard. He had the face and the build of a competent woodsman, and yet his mind was clearly that of a half-grown boy. Jimmie Lad remembered what Tom Gill had reported after his visit to the place and as Semper talked he listened closely, hoping for something that would betray Rakow's plans.

But the man was well trained or too innocent of what was transpiring before him every day. Before he had exhausted his long, disjointed, grumbling complaints of troubles with the wood, the fish-nets, leaking canoes and the difficulties of yeast bread, Rakow himself appeared. With the entrance of the scientist Semper became silent immediately and hurried the preparations for the meal. When it was ready Rakow's supper was served in his own room, while Jimmie Lad ate in the kitchen with the servant.

Rakow returned to the laboratory immediately after eating, but Semper evidently still felt the effects of his presence. He remained silent as he washed the dishes, though Jimmie Lad helped him.

"Got to paddle a mile down the bay to those nets," he muttered when his work was finished. "Doctor always wants fish for breakfast."

Without a suggestion that Jimmie Lad accompany him, he went down to the beach and paddled away.

The boy watched him until he had rounded the point. Then he ran into Semper's room, from the window of which he could see the laboratory. Rakow, carrying a tray of retorts and tubes, was just leaving. He did not come to the residence, however, but turned to the west and went down a trail into the swamp.

The boy watched for a moment and then ran into Rakow's own room, where a window permitted a better view. The kidnaper's white suit could be seen for some time, and even after he had disappeared around a bend in the trail there were occasional flashes of white between the trees.

His heart racing, his skin tingling, Jimmie Lad went to the door. Nothing could be seen of Semper down the bay. Nothing else moved. Rakow was gone, was at least two hundred yards away in the swamp.

For a moment he marveled that he should be guarded so loosely and then glowed with

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pride to think that the kidnaper had so readily believed the story of his running away. Rakow did not imagine he would run at the first opportunity—had given him this chance.

Jimmie Lad did not dash immediately across the open to the edge of the swamp. His footprints could be seen. Instead, he walked carefully, stepping on a piece of wood, a small rock, the root of a tree. Not once, he satisfied himself, did his shoepacks leave an impression anywhere.

Then, when almost at the edge of the swamp, it occurred to him that, in taking this precaution, he had wasted time. He was in the open. Rakow might return and see him. He glanced over his shoulder in sudden fear, caught a glimpse of white deep in the swamp to the right, and the next instant was dashing across the last few yards and plunging into the brush.

Once certain that he was hidden, Jimmie Lad went more slowly but noiselessly. His feet made no sound in the deep moss and he held brush aside before slipping past. He kept parallel to the shore until he came to the creek and then on toward the south. When he found the trail he jumped across it and ran on until he caught a glimpse of the cabin. A moment later he had his rifle in his hands and instantly he ceased to be the fugitive.

The feel of the weapon gave him confidence, there was a thrill in knowing that he could meet Rakow on even terms, or better, and with this assurance he thought for the first time of the two boys in the cabin. He had come to rescue them. Now was the time.

JIMMIE LAD did not hesitate. He broke into the clearing on the run, dashed up to the cabin and threw open the door.

"Come out, kids!" he commanded in a loud whisper.

Two pale-faced, thin-legged boys of about fourteen came from a corner of the darkened building but drew back in amazement when they saw Jimmie Lad.

"Come on," their rescuer repeated. "He's liable to be here any minute. This is your chance."

"Where we going?" asked one of the boys.

"Any place for now, just so we get away from Rakow. Hurry up."

"You mean you're going to take us away from here where we won't be shut up all the time?" asked the other boy.

"Sure. But the kidnaper is liable to be here any minute. Come on."

Simultaneously the two boys started toward him. Jimmie Lad turned, ducked around the corner and started across the clearing.

"Keep low and hurry," he whispered. "And don't make any noise. Keep behind everything that will give cover and watch what you step on."

He pushed aside the brush and slipped noiselessly into it. The boys crashed after him and received a scowling glance from their leader.

"Want him to catch you again?" he demanded. "Quit that noise or I'll take you back to the cabin. Watch me and do the way I do."

He turned again to lead the way and for a few minutes his threat was efficacious. Then, in their efforts to keep up, the boys forgot their caution.

"Look here!" hissed Jimmie Lad. "If you want to be rescued you've got to keep quiet."

"You go too fast," panted one of the boys.

"We've got to go fast or Rakow'll catch us. Now watch your feet and don't step on sticks."

He turned ahead again and for a time the youngsters' efforts were satisfactory. Then, as they were skirting the western side of the little muskeg pond, one stepped on a dry spruce branch and it snapped with a report like that of a rifle.

"Don't you want to be rescued?" demanded Jimmie Lad almost tearfully. "He'll hear that across the lake and be on our trail in a minute. And if he ever catches us he'll cut our throats quick. Now come on. We've got to go a long way before dark."

He traveled more slowly for a time but after a half-mile of leaping from hummock to hummock, of slipping into sink holes, catching their clothes on brush, tripping over windfalls and falling against trees, the two boys were exhausted.

"Please don't go so fast," one of them begged.

"Can't you get through the brush this fast without being played out?" demanded Jimmie Lad with some scorn.

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"We ain't used to it. We've been shut up so long and almost never allowed to play outside."

"Can't go outside that shack?" demanded Jimmie Lad in amazement.

"Only about once a week, and we don't get enough to eat," declared the other. "Look how thin we are."

A dead branch fell from a tree a little way behind them and produced instant panic. Jimmie Lad, crouching low, trailing his rifle, glancing back over his shoulder, dashed away, the two boys at his heels. He did not stop again until he had crossed the swamp and reached the ridge on the north side of the second lake. There he halted and for a few minutes listened anxiously.

"I don't hear him," he said, "but we can't take chances. We've got to keep on until we get to the canoe."

The going around the second lake was far more difficult. Cedars lay at all angles, blocking the way, and some of the sink-holes were so deep and wide the boys fell short in their leaps and were soaked to the waist. Jimmie Lad alternated in leading them. Sometimes he stopped, grasped them about the body and helped them over windfalls.

The sun had set and the swamp was gloomy. A huge owl flew out of a tree just ahead and one of the boys shrieked in terror.

"Look here!" exclaimed Jimmie Lad. "If I'm going to rescue you, you've got to help. Don't you know how to be rescued? Didn't you ever read any books about escaping from Indians? Of course, if you want that kidnaper to catch you again, all right. But I don't want him to catch me. Now come on and be quiet or we won't get to the canoe before dark."

They reached the big lake and the hidden canoe in the last dim light of the day.

"Now the thing to do," said Jimmie Lad, "is to get to the club-house right away. Then in the morning Tom can start out to the railroad with telegrams and your fathers and mothers will know you are safe and the police will be on Rakow's trail."

"But we haven't got any father and mother," said one of the boys. "Anyhow, I ain't, but Milt has a father, only he was drunk all the time and run away."

Jimmie Lad collapsed upon a boulder and stared at the two boys. In one crash his dream mansion had disappeared and he beheld only the sand upon which it had been built.

"Jack never had any father and mother, not that he could remember," said Milt.

An idea flashed through Jimmie Lad's black despondency.

"I see!" he cried. "You've got rich uncles or aunts or grandfathers!"

"I've got an uncle but he's in the pen and won't get out for ten years yet," answered Milt.

"Then why did he kidnap you if there wasn't any one to pay a big ransom?" asked Jimmie Lad faintly.

"We weren't kidnaped," said Jack. "We were adopted."

"Adopted! Who by?"

"That man in the white suit."

"And he never stole you or abducted you or ran away with you, or any of his pals, and he's not holding you for a ransom?"

"Course not," answered Milt. "We was just adopted, like all the rest of the kids. Only we thought it meant we'd have a nice house to live in and lots to eat, pie every day and things like that, and good clothes and maybe a bicycle. But we was sent up here to the man in the white suit and he just kept us shut up and didn't give us enough to eat and wouldn't hardly ever let us play outside."

Jimmie Lad was too stunned to speak. Suddenly he had become very weary, very much subdued, very much a boy. At the beginning he had been crushed only by the realization that his had been the chief rôle in a fiasco, that his imagination and his deductions and his frank accusations had resulted in stirring up Tom Gill and Jimmie Dunn, that for years to come they need only mention the name Rakow to chasten him completely. The humiliation to which he must be exposed seemed unbearable.

"He used to stick syringes in our arms and make them sore," Jack announced, but Jimmie Lad did not hear him.

And then the young rescuer's thoughts were dispelled instantly by a new one, one so significant everything else paled before it. It was he, James Dunn Wells, not Rakow, who was the kidnaper. It was he who had stolen another man's children, adopted children it was true, but his legally. It was he, Jimmie Lad, who might be captured at any moment with these

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evidences of guilt upon his hands. It was he who had wormed his way into Rakow's retreat and Rakow's confidence and then had stolen his children.

"Why didn't you tell me you weren't captive kids?" he demanded fiercely.

"You never gave us a chance," answered Jack. "You just told us to come and we come."

Jimmie Lad arose and looked about him, listened to the night noises of the forest.

"Well," he said at last, "there's just one thing for me to do and that is to take you back."

JIMMIE LAD had reached his decision quickly and, because of his part in the affair, there was no turning back. He had blundered, had unwittingly committed a crime, but committed it nevertheless, and the only course open to him was to make restitution so far as possible.

His conscience demanded that much, but it could not force him to do anything more, and he believed that he could get the two boys back to the cabin in the first light of dawn and then escape before Rakow could lay hands upon him. He was not, however, prepared for the howl of protest that arose from the two youngsters.

"Don't take us back to that cabin!" protested Jack in a hysterical panic. "I'd rather be dead than go back there. I'd rather be lost in the woods and die. It's ten times worse than the orphans' home where we lived."

"I've got to take you back," declared Jimmie Lad firmly.

Both boys cried and protested, entreated, promised.

"Just give us a chance to get to some town or somewhere," begged Milt, "some place where we can earn our own living."

"Can't do it," answered Jimmie Lad. "I stole you, thinking I was rescuing you, and I've got to take you back or be hung for a kidnaper."

"But that man starves us to death and it's the same as killing us to take us back there," cried Milt. "I tell you, we won't go!"

"You will go, and you'll start as soon as we can see to get through the swamp," answered Jimmie Lad.

Neither of the boys spoke again. Theirs had been an ever-repeating experience of unanswerable commands, of sudden, unexplainable changes. To them the world was a huge bag, the neck of which was closed occasionally and the whole given a great shake. They had never known love or pity or kindness, and they did not recognize it as their right.

Here was blind, grim, immutable authority giving them a bare taste of life and then withholding the tempting dish. They had been given tastes before, had been dazzled by the prospects of freedom when some kind-faced woman had singled them out of the crowd, only to pass from their lives forever after a strange question or two.

"Lie down and get some sleep," commanded Jimmie Lad gruffly. "We start before daylight."

He did not greatly fear being found by Rakow. He knew he could not be tracked through the swamp and that the direction he had taken would not be known. So long as darkness lasted there would be no danger. He, too, tried to sleep, but he wakened often. The two boys lay with the blankets drawn tightly over their heads to escape from the innumerable mosquitoes, but Jimmie Lad did not feel the insects. His mind was too fully occupied with his predicament.

As the night wore slowly on he began to fear more and more the result of his action, became more and more terrified by the thought that he might be caught by Rakow, might suffer the punishment it would be believed he deserved. The obsession finally drove him to action and while it was still dark he wakened the two boys and led them over the ridge into the swamp.

For an hour they traveled steadily. Jimmie Lad had taken his course by the stars but after leaving the second lake these had begun to pale. Fear would not let him stop and he pushed on through the swamp, depending upon his sense of direction. Dread that he was swerving too far to the right or left turned him sharply at an angle, and long after he should have reached the little lake near which the cabin stood he was still wandering uncertainly.

Daylight had come, but from the depths of the swamp he could not determine where the sun would rise. The two boys lagged behind, silent but expressing exhaustion in every movement.

Jimmie Lad was about to give up in

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despair, to acknowledge himself lost, when the sky to the northeast burst into a flaming red. He turned toward it at once and hurried on, knowing that he would strike something he knew, even if it were the big lake upon which Rakow lived.

The condition of the two boys curbed him, however. Despite his urgings they could not keep up. They had not eaten since noon of the day before and they were too weak to climb over the windfalls. When they reached a barrier they could not surmount they would wait for Jimmie Lad to help them.

An hour after sunrise Jimmie Lad caught a glimpse of water through the trees ahead. He hurried forward until there was danger of breaking suddenly into the open and then waited for the youngsters to catch up with him.

"I think this is the lake near your cabin," he whispered. "You wait here until I come back."

They sank at once to the moss and lay there. Jimmie Lad squirmed forward a few yards until, peering around a bush, he could look out over the water. To his amazement it was not the little muskeg lake but the bay upon which Rakow had built his retreat. And he had come out upon the shore within three hundred yards of Rakow's house, at a point between the outlet of the creek and the beach.

As Jimmie Lad glanced toward the clearing where the buildings stood he saw Rakow's white suit and instinctively drew back. But at the same moment he saw Tom Gill standing near Rakow and leaning over a canoe. Jimmie Lad looked again and saw Tom suddenly straighten, his rifle in his hands. Rakow stepped back and reached into his pocket. Tom made a rush at him, then stopped, staggered backward, dropped his rifle. Rakow stepped closer, shot out his fist, and the woodsman dropped in a heap.

The boy was paralyzed by the sudden turn of events. He did not move, could not think. He might have remained there indefinitely had he not been aroused by a sudden crashing of brush behind him. His first thought was of a moose, and he drew back and scrambled to his feet to see Jimmie Dunn hurrying toward him.

"Quick, Uncle Jimmie!" he cried. "Rakow has just killed Tom!"

CHAPTER XI

ETHICS *VS.* SCIENCE

JIMMIE DUNN did not seem to have heard. He grasped Jimmie Lad by the shoulders and shook him fiercely.

"Are you all right?" he demanded. "Has Rakow seen you? Did he do anything? Have you touched those boys in the swamp?"

The flood of questions dazed the boy and he caught only the first.

"I'm all right," he declared, "but it's all my fault. If I hadn't told Tom——"

"Did you touch them? Did you go into that cabin? Didn't they say they were lepers?"

"Lepers?'

Jimmie Lad stared in horror.

Jmmie Dunn groaned.

"Of all the arch-fiends I have ever heard of! We tried to get here in time. I tried to find that cabin but I went to the wrong lake. So I struck straight through the swamp for Rakow's place. Tom headed for here, too."

"Yes, and Rakow killed him. I just saw him over there on the beach."

"Killed Tom! Why didn't you say so before?"

"I did, only you wouldn't listen and kept asking questions. Maybe it's not too late. Maybe he only wounded him."

Jimmie Lad led the way to the edge of the swamp and, with a whispered caution, peered out toward the beach.

"See!" he cried in a low voice. "They're carrying him up to the house."

Jimmie Dunn took one look and then turned into the swamp. He had seen Rakow and his servant bearing the limp figure of his old friend up the bank toward the residence and everything else was forgotten.

"Come on, boy," he said grimly. "We may not be too late."

Back from shore he turned parallel to it and started to run toward Rakow's place, Jimmie Lad beside him. Near the edge of the swamp they slackened their pace until, to insure secrecy, they were forced to crawl through the brush to the clearing.

They saw the half-witted servant come out of the house with two traveling-bags and start toward the canoes on the beach. Immediately afterward Rakow came out

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with another bag. He locked the door and then hurried after Semper.

"Running away!" whispered Jimmie Dunn. "He knows the game is up and he's getting out. We certainly are lucky."

He waited a moment until Rakow was half-way to the canoe. Then he arose to his feet and ran out into the open, his rifle in his right hand. He had gone fifty yards before Rakow turned and saw him.

"Mr. Dunn," he called. "This is a pleasant surprise."

"Throw up your hands and no fooling!" cried Jimmie in reply.

He had stopped to be able to shoot quickly, and when Rakow did not move he swung his rifle to his shoulder.

"I meant that!" he said.

Rakow complied and as Jimmie Dunn started toward him he heard Jimmie Lad at his side.

"Keep him covered, too, boy," he whispered, "and keep an eye on that fellow by the canoe."

"Where's Tom Gill?" he demanded when he had stopped ten feet from Rakow.

Rakow was looking straight into his eyes, not defiantly, but speculatively. Then his gaze shifted toward Jimmie Lad and he frowned slightly.

"You know this boy?" he asked sharply.

"He is Marshall Wells' son."

Rakow started, stared at the youngster and then turned to Jimmie Dunn. The man seemed to have shrunk physically, to have become suddenly old. His eyes were dull, deep lines appeared in his face, and his head sank forward.

"Then you—" he half whispered.

"I know everything!" snapped Jimmie Dunn. "Where is Tom Gill? If he is hurt I'll shoot you where you stand."

"He's all right, though perhaps somewhat uncomfortable," Rakow replied in a flat, lifeless tone. "He is in the residence. In time he could have escaped, though not until I had reached a train. I had even planned to send Semper back to release him."

"Quick, boy," whispered Jimmie Dunn. "Run up and see if this fellow is lying."

"There is no need to lie," said Rakow, who had overheard. "If that is Mr. Wells' son you know about the two boys."

"Yes, and the leprosy business, too," answered Jimmie fiercely. "We opened your mail."

Again Rakow started. The blood vanished from beneath his dark skin, leaving it a sickly yellow.

"The leprosy business," repeated Jimmie Dunn still more fiercely, "and if that boy has suffered, Rakow, I'm going to kill you if I have to go behind prison bars to get at you."

"You need not worry," said the scientist dully.

"But he was with those boys in that cabin."

"Yes, I know. Still there is no danger. I have not accomplished anything. My cultures were failures."

His eyes brightened for a moment and he said:

"It would have been different a week later. The lepra bacillus is one of the hardest to culture. But I have found a way and I was expecting new cultures from Honolulu by any mail now."

"Then those boys are not lepers? There is no infection in that cabin?"

"Not in the least."

"But I have seen them," exclaimed Jimmie Dunn. "They are pale, thin, are suffering from something."

"That was merely the preparation for inoculation. A healthy person will not become infected once in a thousand times. It is only those who are run down physically who are susceptible."

"Look here!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn threateningly as he stepped closer. "Are you telling me the truth? I've got to have it, and I will have it if I have to kill you to get it."

Rakow looked straight into Jimmie Dunn's eyes and answered without hesitation:

"I can assure you there is no cause for anxiety. I have failed in my experiments so far. In fact, I am certain there is not a bacillus on the place. Even the bacilli I introduced into an abrasion on one of the boys have apparently disappeared."

Even at this moment there was, in the doctor's voice, only regret over the failure of his experiment. His attitude, however, compelled Jimmie Dunn to believe the man and he turned from him with an overwhelming feeling of loathing and disgust. Coldly, unemotionally, he had admitted that he had starved two innocent children that they might the more easily become the victims of this most dreaded of all diseases.

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Jimmie Dunn also recognized the duty that confronted him, and as he realized the course he must take he thought for the first time that morning of the woman in Chicago. For a moment he hesitated, knowing what Rakow's exposure would mean to her. But a memory of that last interview, of her duty done, came to him, and he felt that, even if she were there and the decision rested with her, there could be only one way open.

THERE was a shout from the door of the residence, and he glanced up to see Jimmie Lad running out, Tom Gill at his heels.

"Then we have prevented the thing you intended to do?" Jimmie Dunn asked Rakow when the two had joined him.

"You have," was the bitter answer. "You have ruined my life-work."

Tom Gill snorted in open disgust, but Jimmie Dunn was looking thoughtfully at the scientist.

"I don't know what the charge against you will be," he began slowly. "I am only afraid it can not be made strong enough. I don't know what the Canadian law is, and of course it is under that law you must be tried. You haven't done anything so far, actually, though it is not because you did not have the intent. You ought to be hung, and I hope you are, but all we can do now is to turn you over to the Canadian authorities. You know what British justice is, I presume. It is a little different brand than we have in the States."

Rakow's manner, in which anger and open contempt were mingled, was his only reply.

"Jimmie Lad," Jimmie Dunn continued, "take a canoe and paddle over to the swamp and get those boys. You give me your word, Rakow, there is no danger of infection?"

"Absolutely none."

Jimmie Dunn looked at him closely for a moment and then nodded to Jimmie Lad.

"Go get them," he commanded. "I believe he is telling the truth. Now, Tom, we may as well move this entire outfit to the club-house. The boys and Semper Eadem must be taken care of and Rakow must be turned over to the police at once. This place should be left as it is. It will be better if nothing is touched until competent authorities can investigate."

"How about that explosive?" asked Tom. "I don't believe it, but we don't want to take a chance."

"There is none."

There was a certain dignity in Rakow's manner which was convincing. After the first few moments of surprise he had failed to display any emotion, except his resentment of Jimmie Dunn's denunciation. At a command he picked up his bag and walked down to the beach, where Semper had been standing at the bow of a canoe waiting for him.

As all four stood there waiting they saw Jimmie Lad leading the two boys out of the swamp and placing them in the canoe.

"Poor little devils!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn. "How long have you had them, Rakow?"

"Three months."

Involuntarily Jimmie stepped back from the man, and he did not attempt to hide an expression of complete loathing.

"Stop that!" cried Rakow fiercely. "I will not permit cheap sentimentalism to be my judge. Your smug, mushy heart is affected only by what comes close to you, by what you actually experience. It is soft enough then, but it is as hard as flint when thousands are dying on the other side of the globe.

"Yours is the sort that accepts the benefits of science and condemns its methods. You are filled with horror by the mere mention of vivisection, by the idea of painless experiments upon worthless domestic animals, and you wound wild game and permit it to die in agony alone in the forest.

"Bah! Were all the world like you we would still be living in the stone age."

His outburst was so sudden, so vehement, so sincere, Jimmie Dunn and Tom Gill could only look at him in amazement.

"My plans of a lifetime have been ruined," Rakow continued less violently, "ruined by your inquisitiveness and mawkish susceptibilities. In two more years I would have arrived at the solution of my problem, would have conquered that most dreaded of all diseases, leprosy. I would have been the first to develop a serum, to have found the cure. I would have been the savior of thousands in my own country in the Balkans, of hundreds of thousands throughout the world.

"I would have removed that ever-present 'Unclean! Unclean!' that hems

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in a multitude. I would have given them the world, where they now have a detested corner of it. I would have liberated souls as well as bodies, would have given civilization another step forward in its striving for perfection."

"And you would wreck those two innocent lives, and others, too, on the chance that this fanciful dream might come true!" retorted Jimmie Dunn without any attempt to conceal his horror.

"Innocent lives!" repeated Rakow fiercely. "What are their lives worth when the lives of thousands in my country are at stake? Who are they? The scum of your nation, outcasts, sons of criminals and destined to criminal, useless lives.

"I know. I traced their histories well. I wanted blood that had never known leprosy, subjects from a country where leprosy was not endemic. I had to be positive there was no taint of the disease for generations.

"And in learning this I learned their moral history and that of their ancestors. Crime and shiftlessness and laziness and uselessness is their heritage, and there was no wrong in taking them for the benefit of humanity.

"Had I proven my contentions, worked out my experiments successfully, the world would have given me its scum to continue the work. Leprous bacilli can exist only in the human body. To develop serum it would have been necessary to inoculate thousands, and the world would have placed its criminals, its morally and mentally unfit in my hands.

"I would have changed prisons into colonies of lepers. Think of it! These useless members, dangerous members, of society could die knowing that they had accomplished some good in the world, that they had given life to more worthy people.

"Conditions here were ideal for my work. There could be no other infection than that I chose to give. The climate is healthful. Once inoculated, I would have built up these boys, strengthened them, given them the best of care that they might fight the disease and thereby build up an antitoxin."

"But they would always have been lepers," interrupted Jimmie Dunn angrily.

"Yes, but would not that be far better than the morally diseased pair they would have become if left in the asylum? Would they not have accomplished a great good in the world, whereas, if left where they were, they would have accomplished only harm?"

AS RAKOW finished Jimmie Lad beached his canoe. The two boys, huddled in the bottom, were looking in terror at the scientist. They did not move, did not seem to see any one else. Dumbly, without pleading, without hope, they stared. Their thin, pale faces, wasted bodies and wide, staring eyes were mute evidence of Rakow's work.

"You beast!" cried Jimmie Dunn. "Keep quiet! I won't listen to any more of it."

"You will," answered Rakow evenly. "I have something more to say. I planned this for years, made every preparation long in advance, took every precaution. There was to be no failure, and, if detection came, no prosecution. Nothing man can do was to stop me."

"It is poetic justice that a boy, a boy like your victims, and not a man, should have been your undoing," Jimmie Dunn interrupted. "Wells' son alone is responsible for the ruin of your diabolical scheme."

"It is the unexpected that always ruins the best of plans," answered Rakow, who began to speak hurriedly as if he wanted to get the matter off his mind. "I was ready for anything except the boy. He deceived me completely. I was ready even for Gill this morning, ready for the first indication that he knew. I expected that sooner or later he would come meddling about, even though I tried to keep him busy with a poacher.

"But the boy brought my ruin. I became too ambitious. As he stood there telling his fanciful story I thought him a godsend for my experiments. It is a body like his, strong, resistant, which will build up a serum that would save thousands. I allowed him to disarrange my carefully laid plans.

"Therein I failed. In another moment I would have been on my way to the railroad, which would carry me out of the country, back to my own home, where leprosy is such a scourge my efforts for humanity would have been appreciated.

"But," and he drew himself up proudly, "do you think I have played my last card?

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Do you think that I, who had the vision, who saw my mission and had courage enough to risk all to accomplish it, would permit blind, sickly, mawkish courts to decide upon the justice of such a course? Bah! I scorn them all, all of you, poor, blind, ignorant, crawling things. What are you that you should persecute me? It is Christ's story over again. The man with the idea is crushed, but the idea never. I am through. But others will come after me. Some day you will know what you have done this morning."

He turned abruptly and started down the beach on the run. Tom Gill's rifle sprang to his shoulder but Jimmie Dunn struck it down.

"Catch him!" he cried. "Don't shoot him!"

They started in pursuit, confident that they could catch him. But Rakow had already gained fifty feet and was running more swiftly than they. Jimmie Lad only, his rifle swinging at his side, could gain upon the scientist.

In a few seconds Rakow reached the end of the beach and darted into the brush. The next moment they saw his white-clad figure scrambling upward on the steep side of the ridge. Before Tom Gill and Jimmie Dunn could reach the end of the beach he was at the top and running out toward the edge of the cliff.

They stopped, suddenly realizing what he was about to do, and looked up in horror. For an instant Rakow stood at the brink and looked down at them. Then he leaped. The white figure sprang out, hung for an instant, and then plunged to the boulders beneath. Before Tom and Jimmie Dunn could turn away it had struck and lay there motionless.

"That's the end of him, and it's well it is so," whispered the woodsman.

"It's well," repeated Jimmie Dunn. "He was colder than sin, Tom, and I never loathed a man more than I did him while he was talking there a moment ago. But you must hand it to him. I don't think he was a fanatic, and if he was not he was a brave man."

Jimmie Lad, his face white, his whole body trembling, walked back to them, occasionally glancing in horror at the white heap on the rocks. It was his first experience with death and he could only whisper when he asked—

"Uncle Jimmie, did I do that?"

"No, lad, no," was the answer as his foster-uncle laid an arm across his shoulders and led him away. "That was done a long while ago."

IT WAS A RIVER

by **E. A. BRININSTOOL**

UP IN the Yellowstone country, during the Sioux campaign of 1876, an officer attached to the command of Colonel William B. Royall, Third Cavalry, was quite inclined to discuss orders and split hairs upon the slightest pretext.

On one occasion when the troops were going into camp along a certain stream, the above-mentioned officer was ordered by Colonel Royall to "put that battalion in camp on the other side of the river, facing east."

Soon after, the colonel noted that his orders were not being carried out, and as he was tired and irritable and in no mood for "any monkey work," he dashed through the stream and reining up alongside the officer, exclaimed—

"Didn't I order you, sir, to put your battalion in camp along the river—facing east?"

"Yes, sir, but you see this ain't a river. It's only a creek."

"Creek be ——, sir!" shouted Colonel Royall. "It's a river—a river from this time forth, by order, sir! Do you understand? Now, do as I tell you!"

There was no further delay.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

HERE'S word to us from one of the old-timers of the West, a man who knew and rode with Frank Gruard. One by one they are "coming across," these men who knew the early West at first hand, and among them they are helping us to see the old days as they really were and are building up a valuable fund of historical information, often throwing light on points that have been obscure to historians.

And if George Harris will, as suggested, tell us about the days before 1874, we'll surely enjoy listening.

Surf, California.

As to Frank Gruard, Government Scout, he was given a lifetime position as scout for his services in guiding General Crook's command out through Sioux Pass in the Big Horn Mountains some time in the 70's, and from 1889 to 1892 I met Gruard many times. His position then was Post Scout at Fort McKinney on Clear Creek, Wyoming, near Buffalo. I rode with him from Fort McKinney to Fort Robinson, Nebraska, the Winter of '90 on the trail to the Pine Ridge. In 1892, in April, he was yet there at McKinney, when the Rustler War was on; George Harris of Trabing, on the Crazy Woman's Fork of the Powder River, could give you many details *re* the adventurous days prior to my time.

A MAN with a more adventurous history than Gruard was one "Liver-Eating Johnson." Last time I saw him was on the Yellowstone, November, 1887, when Sword Bearer of the Absaraka (Crows) led his followers at Fort Custer in Montana. He was a Norwegian, six feet and odd inches tall, weighed over three hundred pounds. His history was published many years ago by X. Biedler, the leader of the Montana Stranglers.

IN THE old time I knew such men as "Yellowstone Jack," "Kelley," Jim Cook (who afterward settled on the Running Water in Nebraska). Edmeaux Le Clair, Post Scout at Fort Washakie, and myself rode together in the Owl Creek Mountains and the Big Horn Basin. I first hit the trail in the Northwest, 1874, and since then have followed up a roving existence. I have been packer, scout, prospector, cavalryman, doughboy, filibuster (Rough Rider, Troop H 1st U. S. V. Cav., 1898), acting interpreter and scout in Luzon (33rd Regt. U. S. Pr. Inf. '99 to 1901), since then, Alaska, Mexico, California and way stations. I am yet in harness as one of Uncle Sam's "dogs of war." Am now guarding bridge on the S. P. R. R. in sunny southern California, but would certainly be in front if age would permit. Perhaps if you should use this letter some of the old boys might look me up. If Brininstool or some of the rest of your authors would take the trouble to write to me I might dig up enough memories of old times, places and people to help out a little.

PERSONALLY, I have always taken the world as a matter of course, and did not consider that I was of any particular importance as a maker of history, for, in fact, a great deal of the history I have seen in the making is not fit for publication. Yet I have followed close in the footsteps of the "Wild West." (The Sioux, Absaraka, Nez Percé, Blackfoot, Shoshone, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Umatilla, Piute, Modoc and Klamath, the Simcoe and Klickitat —and a few more scattering remnants of the Noble Red Man have had the pleasure or pain of "reading my sign," as I have passed carelessly along their traditional trails).—EDWARD C. ST. CLAIR.

IN TAKING us back to the days of Tatar power in Asia during the thirteenth century, Mr. Lamb's stories are giving most of us a new experience. I'm afraid he flatters most of us when in a note to me he says:

"One of the songs in 'The White Khan' is from Li Po, a Chinese poet of medieval days. I don't think it is necessary to mention Li Po's name in the notes, as he is more or less of a classic. . . . The other poem of the tale, 'The Men of W'ang,' is my own fabrication."

He flatters me, anyhow. Doubtless some of you already were familiar with Li Po, but if any one of you can prove he knows less than I do about that, or any other, Chinese poet, I'll pay his expenses to New York just for the privilege of looking at him.

BUT most of us have heard of Genghis Khan, Kublai Khan and Timurlane or Tamerlane, one or all of them, and few names can so magically conjure up the odor of adventure, romance and mystery. Little enough we know, so when Mr. Lamb turns his search-light back through the mists of history and makes the forgotten and

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mysterious ages a living picture before our eyes we are grateful to him for more than a good story.

In the early thirteenth century the Tatars, or Mongols, conquered most of the known world. The Tatar armies, advancing from their homeland just south of Lake Baikal, swept over Cathay (China), Black Cathay (Kara Kitai) Turkestan, and the Han or Kin Empire (Southern China).

This period of conquest, under Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan, was perhaps the most rapid and savage in the annals of history. It extended the Mongol Empire through Tibet, the territory of the Indus, the Kwaresmian Empire (Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey in Asia) up through the Caucasus to the Crimea, and Russia as far as Poland, as it then was.

Under Timur Khan (Timurlane) the empire embraced the Mogul lands in India.

LIKE the empire of Alexander, the Tatar conquest was purely military. It was rapidly broken up, the Mongol armies mingling with the conquered population. What became of Tatary proper? The man who tries to find out what happened to Tatary in the heart of Asia will discover that the book of history is closed, or nearly so. He will get a few glimpses of a stirring story. Decimated in numbers and continually torn by quarrels, the descendants of Genghis Khan defended their homelands against invasion. The Muscovites, or Russians, did not conquer the remaining khans. A Cossack adventurer paved the way for Russian rule.

WE HAVE all heard the expression "catching a Tatar." It comes from the fact that Tatars were bad individuals to get hold of. Like the Spartans and the present Cossacks—who are allied to the Tatars in blood—they were born and bred to fighting. And for sheer courage it is hard to find their match.

THE Tatar method of storming a town is a historical fact. A European traveler in China about 1620 said: "The Tatars do everything in taking a walled city in the opposite way from Europeans. Instead of using their cannon to make a breach in the walls, they attack the walls with horsemen at once, and do not cease their efforts until the city is taken. From the moment the assault is sounded they ply ladders, from the ground and their horses backs, until they have a foothold on the walls. They are reckless of life, which they are more than ready to lose in battle, and each horseman bears himself with the skill and hardihood of a captain."

ANOTHER characteristic of the Tatar army was the speed with which it moved. On a march every soldier had at least one extra horse; when food in the saddle-bags was exhausted the Tatars drank blood from the horses' veins and mare's milk; they seldom stopped on a march to sleep, and were accustomed to push ahead as much as fifty miles a day or more even in extreme cold or in snow.

Their regard for the horse was so high that their boots were fashioned like horses' hoofs, and their hair like a mane hanging down over one shoulder.

An incident relates that a Tatar who was sent to pursue an enemy returned empty-handed to camp when he had killed the other's horse, saying, "Of what use is a man without a horse?"

IN "THE WHITE KHAN" Khlit crosses the border of Tatary into China and encounters the power of the Dragon Emperor with interesting results.

The various personages are to be found in the reign of Wan Li. Li Jusong is taken from history, together with the Lilies of the Court, and the border warfare in which the declining power of the khans, torn by dissension, struggled with the rising sun of China.—HAROLD A. LAMB.

LET us not be hoodwinked by Germany at the last. There must be just one plank to the peace platform—"Prussian militarism must be crushed forever."

We Americans refuse to consider any end to the war but a victorious end, however soon or late it may be in coming. Good. But what *is* a victorious end?

Beating Germany on the field of battle will be a victorious end in a way. But what good will that victory be if it brings us nothing of lasting value? If it leaves the whole bloody struggle to be fought out again at some later day?

And if Prussian militarism lives instead of dies there will be another bloody war. Prussian militarism exists solely for war. It must be killed.

THE other day I received a printed postcard from St. Joseph, Missouri, sender unknown. It read as follows:

Who ever heard of the descendants of the Carthaginians? Nobody! They never troubled any one after Rome got through with Carthage.

How about the descendants of the Prussians?

It took Cato eight years to convince the Romans that Carthage must be destroyed. How long will it take the civilized world to decide about Prussia? Or shall we listen to peace propaganda?

That is a cruel sentiment. It seems to ask for the destruction of the entire Prussian (not the entire German) race. Perhaps our minds approve it as logical and correct, but, not being Prussians ourselves, we can not even plan or wish the destruction of a nation, including its women and children, and including at least some men who have been driven against their will. But Prussian *militarism* must be killed. It is the world's only chance of peace and safety in the future. And so long as there is enough of Prussia, or of Germany, to keep Prussian militarism alive and dangerous, Prussia and Germany must be killed.

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I AM writing in August and you will read this when Winter has come again. I can not predict. No man can predict. But it seems very likely that when Germany is driven to offering peace terms she will try hard to fool us by making large concessions in the west and doing little about the east.

If she tries that trick she must not catch us asleep. The greater danger lies along the Russian and Balkan border. She can restore and indemnify Belgium and Luxembourg, give back Alsace and Lorraine to France, yield up still more of her territory along the western boundary—and go home from the peace conference laughing in her sleeve. Valuable concessions, of course, but as nothing compared to what she does *not* concede.

HER dream for generations has been an empire extending southeastward through the Balkans and Turkey into Asia and on to the Suez Canal, India, China and beyond. Limitlessly beyond. If she emerges from the war with her grip still on Austria, the Balkan States, Turkey, Russia and the new states along the Russian border, she emerges a victor. And a victor with the makings of a greater, though later, victory in her grasp. To the extent that she retains *any* hold upon *any* of these countries she is, to that extent, a victor and a dangerous victor. No matter what concessions she makes in the west, unless crippling indemnities are exacted.

Prussian militarism must be killed. It can not be killed, or really crippled, if Germany keeps open her dangerous doors on the east and southeast.

STILL another interesting contribution to the discussion started by Edgar Young's question "What is the spirit of adventure, particularly in its biological aspects?"

Metaline, Wash.

"The Spirit of Adventure," eh? I can't say what it is, but perhaps I can give some inkling as to what it is not. When "The Spoilers" was published the Eastern critics said it was a fine piece of imaginative writing—of romance, if you please; but the newspaper men west of Omaha praised it for its realism. Except for the sex interest, it was photographic, and the views were taken with discrimination. I was in Nome the next year, and met a number of men who had been in the Noyes-McKensie deal. One of them, a harp by the name of Cullen, was killed by a fist-blow on the streets of Seattle a year or two later.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS speaks somewhere about "the wild guesses at reality" in "The Red Badge of Courage," by Stephen Crane—and Civil War veterans have told me that it is a wonderful picture of a recruit's feelings in his first campaign. In an old *Atlantic* I read a solemn statement concerning Cutcliffe Hyne's "Captain Kettle" and "McTodd," in which their adventures were described as "highly improbable." I have met men cast in the very mold of Kettle and McTodd—lived and worked with them. The paper-collared, pasty-faced parasite who doubted their reality could not have an adventure if he tried—and he will never try, as such things are bad form in his set. Imagination and humor—fraternity with men worthy of it—mark the adventurer.

A DECADENT and degenerate Puritanism, with its hatred of Nature, and its notion that "existence is immoral and unnecessary," have done much to destroy the true Spirit of Adventure, without which we should still be back in Back Bay hanging Quakers and sending their children in slavery to the Barbados. He has the courage to force from the fingers of grim and malignant Nature all that life can give him. If he loses youth and health and life itself in the contest, if his "stake" be finally swept across the green cloth, he settles with the relentless cashier and passes out "into eternal silence and the dreamless dust" without a murmur. Unlike the "Wabble" and the Near-Socialist and a dozen other whiners, he does not holler that the game is crooked because he has not the nerve to play the cards that Nature gave him. I read Kipling's "If" to a Wabble, and he made oration that it presented an impossible creed—that "nobody could meet them conditions." Adventurers did not cry "I can't," and "Wait on me!" when they were boys—they do not put class above country—they never plead exemption from work and war because of religious belief—they meet the white-hot sword of Destiny like men.

"A DEAD game sport" does not necessarily frequent cheap saloons and poolrooms, waste his substance on the most deadly females of the species, combine in politics and labor and society and religion to graft on his fellows—he may be, and usually is as straight as a string and as game as a pebble. The "gunmen" of the old West would more cheerfully risk their lives for a friend than the curs who now wrangle in the room they left would risk their money. He who can "So live each day that you can look every damn man in the eye and tell him to go to ——" has no need to fear anything in this world or the next.—E. C. ROSE.

THE vote by readers on the ten most popular stories (short stories, novelettes, novels, serials) published in *Adventure* during 1918 closes December 31. Covering from the issue of January 3, 1918, to that of December 18, 1918. All the material, therefore, is now in your hands. Send in your vote.

All you need do is write the titles and authors' names of the ten stories you consider best, given in order of preference,

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and mail us the sheet of paper to reach us not later than December 31. If you like, add as many as ten more stories for honorable mention.

POEMS, Camp-Fire and other departments are barred from the regular vote as heretofore, but this year we're going to add a special vote to the regular one in order to find out what relative value the departments have for our readers. After you've listed your ten or twenty stories, write down the following list and put after each item the percentage of value you think it deserves. Call the total value of an average issue one hundred per cent., including both fiction and departments, and then divide up that one hundred per cent. among these items:

Stories (all together)
Poetry (all together)
Camp-Fire
Identification Cards
Fighting the Hun Web
Looking Ahead
Ask Adventure
How to Help Win the War
Lost Trails

In the cases of "Fighting the Hun Web" and "Looking Ahead" make allowance for the fact that neither one is really under way as yet, since there hasn't been time to receive and publish replies from readers in response to the first appearance of these departments. Try to value them according to what they will be when really going.

ADVENTURE is your magazine. We in the office are trying to put into it what you want in it. By "you" we mean, of course, the majority of you. But it's not always easy to find out what the majority of you want. This annual vote seems the best method of learning, though the opinions—praise and criticism—that come in from many of you all through the year are extremely valuable as guides.

It's up to you as far as we see any way of putting it up to you. If you can think of other ways, tell us. And meanwhile send in your vote.

FROM Herman J. Love, of Ely, Nevada, comes to us the following newspaper clipping concerning one of the old pioneers of the West. "Years ago," writes Mr. Love, "I was well acquainted with men who knew the 'Adventurers' who made the Adobe Walls fight."

WITH JOHNSTON'S ARMY

DIED—At Blackfoot, Idaho, December 20, suddenly and naturally, James N. Hanrahan, in the eighty-second year of his age.

And so old Jim Hanrahan—pathfinder, plainsman, Indian fighter and scout—is dead, and after sixty years of a running fight with Indians and gunfighters he died naturally. Well, he had a strenuous life and earned his rest.

HE CAME to Utah with Johnston's army; he fought through the Civil War for the Union; he was a "bull whacker" and a wagon boss with the ox outfits that pulled west from the Missouri with army supplies for frontier posts in '67; he was a scout for Custer in '69, and rode with that long-haired commander when, to the tune of "Garry Owen," the Seventh cavalry swept down at the Washita on Black Kettle and his band of Arapahoes; he was a buffalo hunter during the merciless four years that killed off for their hides the great herds that ranged over the plains between the Platte and Canadian border; he was one of the handful of men that stood off the Arapahoes, Comanches and Kiowas at the battle of the Adobe Walls on the Pala Dura, in the panhandle of Texas, in '74, when 250 Indians fell in a vain attempt to capture two little stockades.

THAT was a battle for sure. Fred Leonard was in it and can tell you all about it. I was not far away and saw the wagonloads of war bonnets, shields, scalps and trophies captured in the fight. When the savagery of men and nature left the plains, Jim went into mining in Colorado and afterward took up ranching in Idaho, where he finally died. Had some one said forty years ago: "Jim Hanrahan is dead," there would have been bowed heads all over the Middle West, but now none but the few yet alive of all those who knew him on the border will take note of his departure. He was an honest man, not for religion's sake, for he didn't have any, but just because he didn't know how to be anything else. He read much and remembered what he read, and once when he was in the legislature of Idaho it was remarked that Jim's ideas were worth consideration.

HANRAHAN was a man of peace, and he would have it if he had to fight for it, and he could fight, if it was necessary, with his fists, or a gun or any old thing he could lay hold of; but mainly he preferred a gun, and, as was said of Thompson, "light and free was his touch upon the revolver—great the mortality incident upon that lightness and freedom." Once when they tried to take the Midnight mine away from Jim in Colorado—a bunch of men with Winchesters—he killed two of them and would have killed the rest, only they got out of range.

Whenever there was a gunfighter hunting for trouble and he could not find it anywhere else, and was bound to have it, Jim would accommodate him, from which circumstances there are several graves here and there in the West. And there was never anyone ever heard to say that he wasn't justified, or asked for anything more than an even

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show. When he died there was none of us who knew him in the old days to say, as did the farmer to his dying son, "Well, good-by, Jim, take keer of yourself."—E. F. COLBORN.

OUR new metal identification cards or tags are ready. Same size and lettering as the present cardboard cards, but made of some aluminum composition, thin but strong, with a hole at each end for fastening to belt or cord.

These metal tags cost us from the manufacturer 20½ cents apiece—20.44 cents, to be painfully exact. We give them to you at cost or below. Send us 25 cents and we'll send you the metal card, postage paid by us. We fix on 25 cents as a convenient amount, the balance of 3½ cents over manufacturing cost being more than taken up by foreign or domestic postage, clerical handling, stationery and general office expense.

If already a holder of one of the old cards, state its number when you write for a metal card. If you like, keep the old card; we'll keep you registered under both cards, their numbers being different. If you want to cancel your old card, tell us so.

But, except to those already having an old card, we will give either a cardboard card *or* a metal card (on receipt of price), but not both.

I KNOW just enough about the following mystery to be as eager to know more as is Comrade Roberts:

Bridgeport, Conn.

I have a question to put up to my comrades of the "Camp Fire." In reading a book published some years ago by a man named Walmsby, called "Zululand, Its Wild Life and Adventures," supposedly founded on facts, there is one thing that the author dwells upon all through the book, namely, "The Lost Cities of Zululand." Undoubtedly some of my bunkies have read this book and I know that a good many of them have been in mysterious Africa and the question I raise is whether the cities that were built in the time of King Solomon, for the transportation of gold and woods needed to build his temple, are anywhere near the Zambesi River. Also if in any part of that territory strange fruits or trees have ever been noted by any of our adventurers. Also if there has been noted any Arab strain in any of the people in that district.

In the book the people found old ruins such as have been found in Mexico and Yucatan of an old temple of stone, but were not allowed to renew owing to the hostility of the natives.

If you will put this up to the sitters-in of the Camp Fire you will do me a favor and will undoubtedly give us more information about Africa which I think we will all enjoy.—L. V. ROBERTS, JR.

WORD from an old comrade who is happy over now doing his fighting under his own flag:

London, England.

Just a few lines to inform you that I have finally secured my discharge from the British Army and am pleased to say that I have rejoined the A. E. F. in the good old Infantry. Am off for Winchester next week to get fitted-out. After that, me being a "trained man," I guess it means and spells FRANCE; so much the better for that. Intend going after a commission, as I think I am eligible for same, if active service counts. At any rate, time will tell.

Best regards to all for the present, trusting this finds you O. K. and that another year will see the finish of this Hell, I remain.—M. LOGIE.

WHAT is going to be done to the men who cheat our Government on war contracts, deliver inferior goods, graft in various ways on the country's great industrial and agriculture machine that supplies and supports our boys at the front? We Americans have grown into the strange habit of looking upon graft as a thing to be expected, passed over with mild punishment or none at all, even smiled at.

Graft is *treason*. A grafter is a traitor to his country.

One of the chief purposes of the American League for Citizenship, Inc., is to teach Americans that the citizen who grafts on public funds or resources or in any way betrays the trust of a public office in peace-time is just as much a traitor as the citizen who betrays our country's Army in war time. But, God help us, we Americans do not recognize a traitor when we see him even in war time.

IF AN American at the front shoots an American soldier, or kills our soldiers by poisoning a well, we can see that he is a traitor and execute him. If he is caught tampering with our soldiers' ammunition at the front or distributing disease-germs among the boys in khaki, we can see that he is a traitor and deserves death. But let him kill our boys at the front from *this* side of the Atlantic. Somehow we don't think of him as a traitor then. *Why not?* In God's name, why not?

Is an American soldier in France any more dead if he died from poisoned well-water than if he died of pneumonia because his rain-coat was useless through graft back in America? Is he any more dead if he's shot in the back by an American on the firing-line than if he died because

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one of his fellow countrymen back home grafted on food supplies or munitions with the result that they were unfit when they reached the soldier?

In either case an American has killed an American soldier for Germany.

THERE are a thousand ways in which graft and greed at home can kill our soldiers and sailors at the front. And just because the cause and the effect are so far apart we aren't clear-eyed enough to see that these grafters are black traitors to their country with blood on their hands.

Our soldiers' safety, our country's whole cause, is absolutely dependent upon the munitions and supplies furnished our forces. How many millions and millions of times in the millions of diversified situations and crises of fighting do the lives and fighting value of our soldiers hang on the slender thread of difference between perfect weapons, equipment, clothing and food on the one hand and imperfect ones on the other! No human being can measure and record all the deaths and losses from little imperfections, but we know that they are there.

Yet these Americans back home who are responsible for those imperfections—we forget, somehow, that they are black traitors to America, that their hands are red with our soldiers' blood.

AND it is not only imperfections that kill. Delays also kill. Supplies and munitions that are not where they are needed mean dead American soldiers. Delay in building ships for carrying means dead American soldiers. The man who causes these delays for his own selfish profit, be he capitalist or workman, is a black traitor to America, a slayer of American soldiers at the front.

Compared to these grafters the German agent in our midst is a noble being, the traitor at the front a hero.

I HAVE called them traitors, but they are unworthy of even that shameful name. A traitor may be a brave man, but these jackals are not men at all. They take no risk comparable with their gains. They claim virtue, like a sewer that claims to smell sweet. A beast of prey, however hated, commands some respect; a vampire none. How Benedict Arnold, a brave man for all his treason, would look down in contempt upon these millionaires and workingmen, these contractors, purveyors, agents and laboring men who betray their country in so cowardly and mean a way!

Traitors? They are not fit to be called traitors. However great the harm they do, they are too small and cowardly and dirty to be called even a shameful name that has been dignified by custom with the risk and penalty of so big a thing as death. Traitors? No, only *eunuch traitors*.

DEATH is too good for them. Make it life imprisonment. Let them live with their shame and our contempt for sole companions. Make the sentence non-commutable, the offense unpardonable.

And if some of them, unfortunately, are given lesser terms behind the bars, let us see to it that when they try to come back to the country they have betrayed they find only shame and contempt to greet them. There is blood upon their heads, the blood of American patriots. You who have lost a son, a husband, a brother, a sweetheart, perhaps through the treachery of these same sneaking curs, can *you* shake them by the hand, greet them smilingly on the street, even let the hem of your garment brush against their outcast bodies?

PERHAPS some day I can be Christian enough to forgive. Now I can see only their hands dripping with American blood, hands infinitely more accursed than the German hands that kill our boys in open battle. It is right to forgive, and I who can not do right in this matter should not be urging others to unforgiveness. But mark this, even if some day we can forgive, *today our duty is to save our boys at the front from traitors and eunuch-traitors here at home.* If these reptiles know their bloody crimes make them social outcasts, they will go slower in their filthy greed. We can put that check upon their traitorous murdering, and it is our duty.

TO PERFORM their assigned war duties, the following now cooperate as a single unit: Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., National Catholic War Council (including K. of C.), Jewish Welfare Board, American Library Association, War Camp Community Service and Salvation Army. That makes very clear and easy our duty and opportunity to back our firing-line. **A. S. H.**

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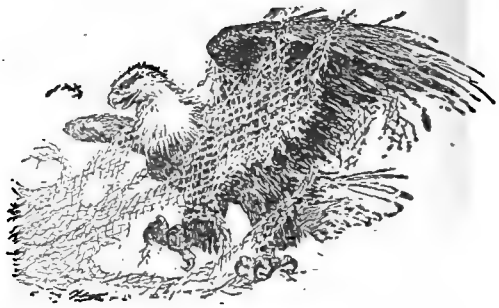
FIGHTING THE HUN WEB



A department devoted to throwing light upon the Actual working of the subtle German propaganda in the United States, Canada and the other Allied countries. Every time you discover one of the strands of this web, tell the rest of us about it, briefly but clearly. Once seen, it loses its dangerous power.

Captured Germans Carefully Equipped with Propaganda to Weaken their Captors

Norway, Maine.

"GERMAN propaganda" simply means the changing of an individual's, or a nation's, view-point by constant repetition of an untruth or a half-truth. Unless opposed, this repetition will succeed in establishing as a fact any proposition desired. Repetition takes the place of evidence. If only enough people will repeat the same statement, regardless of the utter lack of evidence, that statement will come to be believed by a majority of the people. This credulity in most instances will be transitory, perhaps, but so long as it exists it works evil. The public press is just catching up with the wide-flung story that Canada was reveling in sugar while the American housewife was going without. It might well be that in certain portions of Canada there was a temporary average supply of sugar. It has been so in this country, in the South and West, due to local conditions. To arouse the American housewife's animosity by making her believe she was the goat in the sugar shortage was to do a real Hun service. Repetition spread the story and convinced many households. The belief neither demanded nor received any substantiation.

HOWEVER, this communication does not concern sugar, as the truth is now known, and the harm has been done in the shape of prejudice, irritation and the housewife's passing belief that she was discriminated against. I inclose a clipping, one of many A. P. dispatches regularly appearing in the public press, playing up facts and evidencing how the repetition of a truth can mold public opinion. The press item states that "many letters taken from the prisoners, whether written by them to be posted home, or received by them from civilians in the interior of Germany, are in the same vein." After several days' perusal of these letter-excerpts I find the same note running through each: "Poor Germany!" or, "Unless they want to exterminate us, etc." When Germany thought she was winning no pessimistic letter got by the censor. It was no uncommon thing for a wife to receive a terse note to the effect that her husband was shot at daybreak because of some epistolary complaint or criticism. Those who have dwelt in Germany during the war cite cases where women writing their husbands at the front concerning sickness of children and the like, had their letters returned with the curt command to write nothing but cheerful news to their men. Now, it would appear, the law is off. Civilians are free to write to soldiers and the letters are received and *preserved*. In the old days, when the Hun sat in the driver's seat, such letters would bring the writers before a firing-squad.

"WHY can't the English be satisfied? What more do they want? Germany has lost all. Why can't we have peace?" This is the gist of some letters. It's peculiar the soldier should not only save these, heretofore damning documents, but that he should invariably have a letter written by himself planted in his clothes and waiting to be posted just when he was captured.

It's the old idea of repetition with a two-fold object. First, to convince the American folks back home that Germany has cracked and is "all in," thereby slacking up war work and the Fourth Liberty Loan campaign; secondly, to mold public thought round to a point where unconsciously large masses of people undertake to answer in their unvoiced thoughts the queries put up by the Huns. Already I have met zealous citizens who pause in their back-home war activities to say, "Of course we're not out to exterminate the German people. They've got the wrong notion. We're out to break the Kaiser and his clique. God knows the world is sick of war."

BUT there are other excerpts from the letters the public mind is chewing on even while I write this. "Germany has lost all. Why can't we have peace?" Tell it often enough and as a people we'll grow to believe that Germany has lost all. Once we believe that, we'll be ready to make peace—a hideously deceptive "peace" consisting only of a lull long enough for the arch-assassin to reload his gun. This inclosed clipping says "The Germans are in despair." Let no one believe that—for world-suicide lies that way—until Germany proves

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her despair by permanently ousting Kaiserism, Prussianism, Junkerism. Then will be time for the righteous to determine the terms of peace with a chastened people waiting in the ante-room to learn the conditions.

I am convinced that these "captured" letters are working a mischief. If you have not already taken any steps to combat their insidious influence I wish you'd show them up in your Hun Propaganda department. Too many of our patriotic citizens believe "German propaganda" spells the work of spies and emissaries exclusively, and forget an innocent man or woman may be a "carrier."—HUGH PENDEXTER.

Four German Weapons

New York.

THE following have come to my notice quite recently. From a very large banking institution with which I have to do occasional business I received by itself in an envelope a folder beautifully printed, with a picture of George Washington and a very subtly worded account of his efforts as a man of peace. The point dwelt on was that he made peace at the first possible moment (which does not happen to be true; he made none until he could do it honorably). The point not dwelt on, but suggested, was that England was then the enemy. The thought conveyed was that England is no more to be trusted now than then. From first to last there was not one word that the police could take legal exception to, but to a man with his eyes open it was a perfectly obvious pacifist pro-German effort camouflaged to look on the face like watery patriotism. I demanded an explanation from one of the officials of the institution, but he was unable to make any. He said "The thing speaks for itself." I assured him it did.

A VERY well-educated man, a doctor, moving in good society, greatly given to the social round, and a man whose opinions are conceded to carry weight, told me that to his certain knowledge the English had bought up all the American breweries. He said he remembered well when they did it. The point of the lie (for it was a lie out of whole cloth, as he knew very well) was that breweries and allied interests have been caught and exposed again and again working in pacifist and pro-German plots. The effort was to undermine faith in England and make trouble between allies who are coming together today to the huge discontent of the friends of tyranny. The same man makes no secret of his belief that power should be taken out of the hands of the people and made over to the intellectuals.

I WAS told very seriously by an American with no German ancestry or associations that I could discover that after this war is over England's enormous debt to the States will be paid by the cession to this country of Canada. I did not see the point of the absurd lie until I realized that there were two Canadians in the company.

The Canadians were very much upset that any such idea should have foothold in the States, and had there not been somebody at hand to denounce the lie and expose it as pro-German propaganda much harm might have been done.

A DRAFTED man in khaki, shortly due for the front told me the other day that the next war would be with England. I told him to fight like a man and win this one first instead of talking like a fool, and that if this war is only properly won by him and the like of him there will never be another war with any country. He had been thoroughly poison-gassed, but he got the right antidote.—TALBOT MUNDY.

LOOKING AHEAD

"Win the War but Get Ready for Peace"

No matter how long the war lasts it is our first duty during that time to work unrelentingly for victory. But we have a second duty. In peace we failed to prepare for war. In war we must not fail to prepare for peace.

To help in meeting this second duty while we are meeting the first, *Adventure* has instituted this department. Its main purpose is to direct our readers' attention more

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definitely to the many problems America will face when peace comes and to offer an open forum for exchange of views.

In order to hear from as many as possible each expression of opinion must be limited to not more than one hundred and fifty words at most. Merely state the problem that, to you, seems most urgent, adding briefly if you like, your idea of the right solution. The department's value lies in the opinions taken as a whole, not in any one of them.

"Looking Ahead" is not a place for editorial opinion. It is a forum for the opinions of as many as possible; its office is to seek the consensus of those opinions as a guide and stimulus to all. The editors will do their honest best to make the selection for publication as closely as possible indicative of the proportionate importance given the various problems and suggestions by the Americans of all classes and conditions who read our magazine.

It is up to you as an American to do your part. If you haven't thought about these things, think now. Then tell us what you think.

All contributions must be signed, with address given. Only initials will be printed if you insist, but the nation's problems are matters on which an American should not be afraid to speak over his own name.

Washington, D. C.

IN YOUR department "Looking Ahead" you say: "In war we must not fail to prepare for peace." Why not anticipate, and get to work at once on the most important material enterprise of the century? This is the completion of the railway system of the United States into and through Mexico and Central America to Panama, and from thence into and through South America to a connection with the railways of that continent to Buenos Aires, Manaos, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Santiago, Valparaiso and other cities. It is popularly known as the Pan-American Railway System. It will be the spinal column of the Pan-American League as proposed by President Wilson.

THIS system is now completed to or near San Salvador, south of Mexico. The distance from that point to Panama is about six hundred miles, of which there is a completed mileage of some three hundred miles in San Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Nicaragua stands ready to complete the gap along the west shore of Lake Nicaragua, about one hundred miles, to connect with the Costa Rica railroads to Port Limon on the Atlantic coast, leaving a gap of some two hundred miles to be constructed to Panama.

THE existing gages need adjusting part of the way, in that section. These can conform to the United States Standard gage, which when completed can handle freight and passengers, as a great trunk line, without the inconvenience of transfer in transit. Much, if not all, of these gaps can be constructed for thirty thousand dollars per mile, or nine million dollars for the three hundred miles. Through the republic of Panama it is estimated a narrow-gage railroad can be built and equipped for twenty thousand dollars per mile.

The lines as operated enter Mexico at Eagle Pass, Laredo, El Paso and other points. With the line in good physical condition, the schedule time from Panama to the United States could be made in about fifty hours, and from thence to New York in about sixty hours more, or about four days between New York and Panama. When the line is extended to La Paz, Bolivia, to connect with the Argentina railroads to Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the schedule time can be covered in eight days. The present time between New York and Buenos Aires by sea is twenty-four days—a saving of two days more than two weeks to be accomplished by the proposed line. The annual tonnage and travel over the completed line will run up into many millions.

To save delay, the construction of the line from Panama can be built northward without waiting for the war to close, as plenty of labor can be had. It will not interfere with the Panama Canal traffic, but will be a powerful contributor to the prosperity and success of that great enterprise.

SINCE the war began Great Britain has not been backward in her efforts to win it. She has built more than one thousand miles of railroad in Africa and Asia and is pushing the completion of the Cape to Cairo road through East Africa. When the war is over she will control the travel and traffic of the three continents between London, Cape Town, Jerusalem, Cairo and India. What will the United States have to show at the end of the war if we neglect to complete the Pan-American Railway System to Panama—and ultimately to South America, and form the Pan-American League for the mutual defense and material development of the American continents?—GENERAL E. F. TEST.

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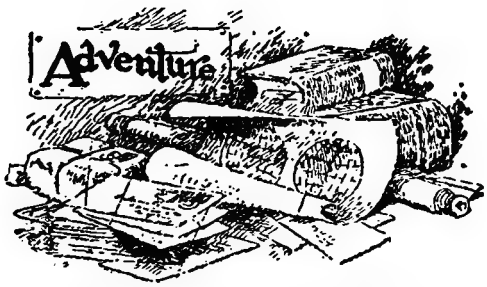

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For 25 cents we will send the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Postpaid. This is cost price.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: 1915, June and December; 1916, all except April; 1917, January to July, inclusive, Mid-October to December, inclusive; 1918, January, March to June inclusive and Mid-July, 36 issues in perfect condition. $5.00 plus carriage.—Address, C. C. WEAVERLING, 1326 Euclid St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp at the Front, or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure,*" letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

PVT. FREDERICK RICHARD WILKINSON
PVT. MILO DE GROFF
PVT. RALPH D. MUTH
CORPORAL FRED J. SULLIVAN
SEAMAN LUCIUS A. BABCOCK
All in care of *Adventure.*

SPR. HERBERT M. JONES, 2569301. C Coy., 10th Can. Rly. Troops. B. E. F., France.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's,* Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

American Defense Society, Inc.—An organization working systematically for real Americanism and furthering the winning of the war by watchfulness and effort at the right point. Address 44 East 23d Street, New York City.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 33d Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries. (Mr. Whiteaker is now serving with our army in France. His department is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Nitro, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports: hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios. (Mr. Ritchie is now in France as a correspondent. His section is accordingly in abeyance until we can find a suitable successor.)

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 724 North 3d St., Reading, Pa. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

A House-Boat Home on Old Mississipi

SUCH a life as this inquirer dreams of seems almost too good to be true; but Mr. Spears evidently thinks it can be attained if the seeker goes about his quest in the right way.

Question:—"I received your answer to my inquiry concerning a house-boat life. Many, many thanks. Now if you'll favor me just once more I won't trouble you again.

"Will you tell me the places along the Mississippi below Vicksburg where one is most likely to find house-boats in quantity? I want to get a location along the river near some small town, where the location is high enough to escape overflow. I don't care to trip the river at present. Fact is, Mr. Spears, I want a home and the life that appeals to me along with it. I haven't sufficient money to buy a farm along the shore, and am no farmer, but like to garden.

"I've thought a house-boat would give me a home where I'd never be kicked out, and at less cost—cost I could afford, and a life I'd take to and stick with. I am single and over the draft age and one reason I don't desire a farm (even if I could get it and hold up or make it pay for itself) is because I may be called when it was just beginning to bring a return on the investment.

"From Memphis down to Vicksburg is low country, is it not? The Yazoo basin. I want to get below the ice, where there is good timber, plenty of nut trees. (I'm great for gathering nuts and wild grapes, etc.) If I can get in the woods and wander around all by myself or with a good pal, I'm happy; what's more, I could half starve, wear rags, just so life wasn't constant work, with the pleasures I care nothing for as the only recreation.

"I've been all over the West and the Southeast, but like the old Mississippi best.

"What brand of magazines has most of your stories about house-boat life? I wish to buy them.

"I want a little joy before I'm called, if I ever am.

"Don't those shanty-boaters have regular towns, as it were, in good locations, where I'll find plenty of boats?

"Now you know the river, and it might be good location above Vicksburg. If I get a good location, I'm going to stick.

"What I've often wondered: Do the store-boats use county or State license? Also at landings a

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rent must be paid I suppose. Been thinking of starting a store-boat and wondering what sort of stock I'd need. I want to be a free lance; if possible, run some sort of business.

"Now any advice you can give me will be thankfully received.

"I'm going to try writing a story after I get a typewriter, on which instrument I'm no slouch.

"This traveling is expensive, so if I know of certain places to go I can save a lot. But I'm bound to have a house-boat or die wanting one. Wish for a thing long enough and you generally get an imitation of it. Thanking you for all favors."—ROBT. C. KNOX, Bentonville, Ark.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Probably you would do best to go to Vicksburg and look over the boats there that are sold by upper-river trippers. I saw a lot there in the old days. You could probably buy one there; or you could get a skiff and drop down the river looking for one.

Natchez is another shanty-boat town—a few boats usually there. Then Placquemine is a great shanty-boat stopping-place, from all that I hear, but I was never there. I turned up Red River and down Chaffeli (Atchafalaya).

You could get a very cheap boat or build a roofing-paper cabin on a little scow for a few dollars, and then wait for just what you want to come along.

Overflow is all the way down the river, except at the various Chickasaw Bluffs, and behind the levees, which is away from the river. Ground above overflow is very scarce on the Mississippi. Memphis, Fort Pillow, Natchez, Vicksburg, Grand Bluff about all, but I think if you went up the Yazoo (from Vicksburg) you would find almost if not quite exactly what you are looking for, within one hundred miles or less. I would run around a bit before locating, to make sure.

There is beautiful country up White River, up Arkansas River, up Red River, within one hundred or two hundred miles of the Mississippi, as well as up the Yazoo. East of the Mississippi, in the wooded hills of Mississippi and Alabama, are fine, slow-river countries, finely adapted to house-boating, but with high grounds.

If I were you, I would rather prospect around a few weeks in a skiff, or even inexpensive small gasoline boat, which would give you an idea of the country—up Yazoo, especially.

Shanty-boat towns are just happenso—they form at levee camps, saw-mill towns, in mouths of rivers (Arkansas Old Mouth, Yazoo, etc.,) and I've seen a dozen boats at a landing in the evening, and three boats the next noon.

Thousands live in a house-boat as home—cheapest home there is; nut-trees in bottoms—pecans and hickories in places, walnuts, too, and I don't know what all. Hardly any ice below Cairo, except what comes down with the spring break-up, and that runs to Vicksburg, or below, but a house-boat is safe in big eddies below sandbars, against banks, but not in caving bank bends.

About writing stories; most of my work goes to Munsey and Street & Smith Company, who publish it in *Argosy*, *All Story*, *Detective Story*, *People's* and *Popular*. *Argosy* and *All-Story* and *Detective Story* magazines all have a large amount of my copy on hand. *Adventure* recently bought some of my work.

I enclose list of books about writing, and the *Editor* magazine, Ridgewood, New Jersey, is good to read if one wants to write; gives markets and advice. I've marked several of the books you would find interesting, and perhaps lucrative; but you will have to write the story yourself in your own way about your own idea.

Store-boats don't have licenses, as a rule, but stop where licenses are not demanded. They carry everything from fake medicine and electric belts and fake jewelry to dry-goods, groceries and fire-arms.

Why don't you go across to Fort Smith, get or build a skiff and drop down the Arkansas, keeping your eyes open for what you want? You can build a scow for fifteen dollars, and have a roofing cabin, and live on board on the way down. If I can help further, let me know.

Lima, Peru

HERE'S a correspondence that "points a moral and adorns a tale." The tale is an account of Lima, Peru; the moral is: When writing A. A. editors, *always enclose return postage:*

Question:—"I am leaving within ten days to take up a position as garage manager at $150 per month in Lima, Peru.

"Can you help me with a little information as to the climate, living expenses, and outfit it would be wise to take with me, and where in New York I can purchase this? Any other information of a general nature concerning Lima will be very highly appreciated and acknowledged."— —— ——, Akron, Ohio.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—Your letter of the ninth of June reached me to-day, the thirteenth, Since you say you expect to leave within ten days. I am making a concession and giving you a prompt reply, although you have failed to comply with the simple rules of this free service to the extent of supplying return postage.

Lima is properly within the tropical description of cities. Callao, its port, is more tropical, however, than the capital itself, although both are in practically the same latitude. But in Peru the coast regions are less pleasant than places even a short distance inland, owing to the rise of the Andes.

In Lima the climate is dry and pleasant generally, seldom visited by much rain; but during the Winter fog and damp occur frequently. So that in estimating your outfit you should take these things into consideration, carrying with you plenty of cool-weather underwear and damp-resisting outer clothes besides your hot-weather garments and working rig, which will be just those things you would use at home.

I think perhaps Bannerman, Broadway, New York, will be able to supply a suitable outfit as well as anybody, but as a plain matter of fact you could procure the outfit anywhere by making out a list of the various items and shopping around a bit. Except that it is within the tropics, Peru calls for very little in the way of outfit that you would not use in the warmer parts of the United States.

I can not state living expenses now. As you understand, the war has smashed prices and living conditions all over the approachable world. But your stated $150 monthly will see you fixed quite

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well. Money in Peru is based on the libra, gold, equal to the United States $4.87, or the English pound sterling. The libra is split up into ten soles, and the sol into one hundred centavos.

While the currency is on a gold standard, gold is rarely seen, most of the coins in circulation being silver. Metric weights and measures obtain.

The city of Lima is a fine city, with advanced ideas. You will lack nothing there which you are accustomed to at home, and will find many things of value you have not yet seen. There is one thing you might very well find useful and very profitable. If you can secure a good typewriter agency before going down you can easily double your income; but select a good machine backed by a reputable firm. Peru is wide open for typewriters.

Angoras and Karakuls

IF YOU don't think raising goats is an adventurous occupation, try it. At the end of a year you'll have something besides an income tax to report:

Question:—"I have been reading *Adventure* magazine for last four years and the *Wide World Magazine* since 1911. Although I was born in this town I lived for a few years on a farm and since then have never been able to get used to the city. I have weak lungs but am stronger than the average city man as I keep in a fair condition through camping trips and swimming.

"Not wishing to appear a slacker I did not claim exemption in the present draft, but was passed A1 and when I am sent to camp expect to be rejected. I wish you would send me some information as to chances of taking up a homestead claim near San Diego, Cal. I have sent to the Department of Interior for circular No. 484 as you advised in 'Ask *Adventure*' but have not yet received same, but I expect to get it in a few days.

"I would like to get a piece of ground in which I could erect a cabin and grow enough stuff for my own living, preferably in the mountains, not high enough to be affected by cold, near the coast.

"Do you think near San Diego a good place for this or do you think some other part of California better? I expect to be able to land there with $300, with which I wish to buy tent, rice, sugar, tools. I am able to live on a small variety of food. Can rice and sugar be bought now in 100 pound lots? I would like a spot at least 5 or 10 miles from nearest town and place where there are fair fishing and gaming."—W. R. M., Philadelphia, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—I have serious doubts about your finding homestead land near San Diego or any other city on this coast. There have been several million other men hunting the same thing during the last forty years and the homestead land is reduced to mountain benchland, desert land, and land that is good only for goat pasture. If any good land is to be had it will be 'way over in back of beyond, where pack mules are the only freight-cars and markets are unknown.

This brush land where only goats will thrive is within reasonable distances of markets and when one raises Angoras for the mohair or the Karakul sheep for the Astrakhan lamb pelts, that land becomes valuable. I would undertake to make a living and accumulate something substantial by taking up a brush claim, where there was a small stream, and raising Angoras, Karakul sheep and fur rabbits.

The meat of these rabbits brings 22 cents a pound now and they grow to weigh as high as sixteen pounds. One was killed here in January that went to nineteen, and gave twelve pounds of dressed meat, besides a valuable pelt.

There is no restriction on rice, but sugar can be had only in 5-pound lots at present writing. You will find a better chance for such living as you desire and such a business, anywhere from San Bernardino north to Santa Barbara.

Fishing for trout is permitted, May 1st to October 1st. Hunting: Waterfowl, October 15th to February 1st; deer, August 15th to October 14th inclusive. Rabbits: October 15th to January 1st. Plenty of sea fish any month in the year. When one drops out another comes in.

The Lagos-Zungeru Telegraph

IN CONNECTION with this question and answer, the speculation arises: Why don't the African savages, with their known fondness for copper, render the Nigerian telegraph inoperative by stealing the wire? Maybe Mr. Miller, or some other friend of the magazine, will take time to tell us:

Question:—"May I ask for some information regarding Nigeria—labor, trade, expenses; especially land-line telegraph running from Lagos on the coast of Nigeria to Zungeru, thence branching to Sokoto and Yola.

"Are Americans employed by this telegraph company and in what capacity?

"What form of government have they and what languages are principally spoken there?

"Thanking you for whatever information you may give."—L. Frisch, Piqua, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—The Lagos-Zungeru telegraph line is, like all British telegraphs, under government control, being a part of the postal system, the employees being civil service. It is possible that in these man-shy days an American could get employment, but the clerical work and simple jobs are done by blacks.

Nigeria is an African protectorate under the British flag, with a governor and residents of three classes in outlying districts. A resident corresponds to what we would call an Indian commissioner—that is, a white to see that the white man's laws are kept.

As for labor, trade, expenses, in Nigeria, that is a big order. The trade is chiefly palm-oil; next, rubber, ivory and spices. Skilled mechanics are used in the coastal shipyards, mostly as foremen over blacks, and whites are used in the mines and trading-stations, though owing to the tropical heat the hard labor is done by blacks.

By expenses do you mean the cost of getting there? War has upset rates and conditions, but roughly double the cost from New York to London. and that would take you to the Gold Coast.

If you had something definite in mind and put a definite question on it I could perhaps be of more use to you.

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Following the Harvest

ONE of the best ways to see the world—not Cook's-touring through—is to work your way from place to place:

Question:—"I am nineteen years old and with a friend of mine of the same age expect to leave for Oklahoma in the Spring, to find work and possibly to take up a tract of land there. I would like to know something of the industries there and the chances of us bettering ourselves there. Do you think that Oklahoma offers a better chance than Texas? Please do not print name."— —— ——, Canandaigua, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Robertson:—I think that you and your young friend can get work in Oklahoma without any trouble. There is plenty of work of every character in that State at the present time. No doubt you could go there in the Spring and get work on a farm, and stay with that until June, when the wheat harvest begins, then you can get all of the work that you wish. The pay will be from four to six dollars a day. You can start in Oklahoma in June and work north to Canada, where the harvest ends. You would reach Canada in about August or September.

It would not cost you a cent to get up north if you follow the harvest, as you would have your fare paid to the next town or next place without any trouble. The work is hard, but you will be paid in proportion to the work, and this is about the best-paid work that I know of.

Lots of young fellows do this in the Summer. They not only make big money, but the outdoor work does wonders for them; they would hardly know themselves in the Fall. There could be no better or healthier work under the sun. You would not have to hunt the work once in Oklahoma; the work would hunt you.

Gold in Central America

THE yellow metal is still the premier lure to the prospector, probably because it is the most precious metal that is widely distributed and easily recognized:

Question:—"What state or states of the Central American group do you consider the best for gold-mining? Is the gold coarse or in dust? What kind of soil is it found in? How is the gold gotten out of the soil? Is it there in paying quantity? Is the country open to prospectors or does one require a license of any kind?

"Is the interior covered by jungle? Is one likely to get fever? Is the interior inhabited?

"Is English spoken to any extent or is knowledge of Spanish absolutely necessary? Would you get your outfit there or here in the States? What kind of outfit is used in this kind of country? What arms would you take?

"What route do you consider best from the State of Washington?"—T. N. TRACY, Bremerton, Washington.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I consider Honduras and Nicaragua the best of the Central American countries for gold mining— the Department of Olancho in Honduras and the headwaters of the Segovia, or Wanks River, in Nicaragua. Gold is to be found in these two countries in ores, coarse and in the dust or flour form. A gold-mine that has produced about $20,000,000 is located at San Juancito, Honduras. It is owned by the New York and Honduras Rosario Gold Mining Co., of New York City.

Gold is obtained from ores by smelting and from the soil by washing. This latter process is known as "placer" mining. Get hold of some old prospector out there and get him to wise you up on this easy method of mining.

In parts of both the countries I have mentioned gold is to be found in paying quantities. It is said in the Department of Olancho, Honduras, every square foot will yield "colors" or small pieces of gold. Good "placer" ground, of course, must be searched out, but I dare say, with American methods and push, land which is now lying idle could be worked to advantage. The countries are wide open to prospectors and welcome them.

The eastern half of both countries is covered with heavy jungle and the eastern slope of the mountains is where the gold lies. One is very likely to get fever (malaria) but with some care this can be avoided. Take a couple of grains of quinin each night and sleep under a mosquito bar.

The interior of these countries is inhabited by people of mixed Spanish and Indian blood and in places by pure-blooded Indians. English is not spoken to any extent. A few Americans are to be found scattered here and there.

I would get my gold-pan and scales here. The rest may be purchased down there. The outfit is very nearly the same as that used by prospectors here and should be small enough to carry on one's back. I would take a thirty-thirty Winchester repeating rifle, a thirty-eight Colt revolver, and a twenty-two Remington for a "table" gun.

The best route is *via* Seattle to Frisco, Pacific Mail to Corinto, Nicaragua, and up over the railroad to Leon, or Masaya, and overland from there. Write Wm. C. Robertson, Galeras, Olancho, Honduras, about mining in his section.

Please Throw In

HERE'S a brother who gets some help from an "A. A." editor, but could probably get more from "A. A." readers. Come on; let's throw in and help him—or anybody else whose thirst for information needs further slaking!

Question:—"Could you give me the addresses of any museum or parties collecting natural history objects in the countries covered by you as noted in *Adventure*. I am making up a book containing the addresses of collectors in all parts of the world and would thank you to lend me any assistance you can. —GEORGE G. MACBEAN, Assiniboia, Sask., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Ritchie:—I regret my knowledge of museums in this country is limited. Of course, the most prominent institution in the United States is the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. No street address necessary. I happen to know that the University of California maintains a large natural history and anthropological museum. Beyond these two my knowledge does not carry.

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HOW TO HELP WIN THE WAR

A Department Telling What *YOU* Can Do And How to Find Out about It

To make such a department comprehensive, reliable and up to date entails much work and considerable machinery. Since this machinery has already been created and put into operation, *Adventure* can render service most efficiently by giving its readers the use of this practical agency for connecting individual willingness with national needs.

***Adventure's* big brother, *Everybody's Magazine*, now conducts a "War Service Guide."**

There are thousands of good Americans who, with all their hearts, want to help in the big job at hand, but do not know what to do or how to find it and it is these patriots which *Everybody's* "Guide" wants to help enlist where they can be of real service. If you are one of them, write to Mr. Hoyt, care of *Everybody's* "Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Tell him your circumstances and your qualifications—whether you are looking for volunteer or paid work, whether you can give all or part time, in your home town only or anywhere the job may call you. Give him all the data he may need to judge what work you might do. There are "bits" to be done in farm and industrial work, in various relief organizations and in the Government offices as well as in the Army and Navy.

***Everybody's* "Guide" will also be glad to tackle any question of allowance or allotment, Government insurance or legal status growing out of the new and closer relationship which many are forming with Uncle Sam. Let *Everybody's* "Guide" try to help you.**

Do YOUR Part

Find out what to do and how to do it by writing to *Everybody's* "War Service Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

HIGH, CHARLIE or AUBREY GODFREY, believed to be with A. E. F., communicate with me as soon as possible. I would be very pleased to hear from any of the old-timers or anybody who feels any little sympathy for a poor old wanderer.—Address LEON NICHOLS, care of *Adventure.*

CHASE, S. When last heard of was with C. & O. Railroad Co. in Chicago, Ill. Please write your old pal, A. C. YOUNG, General Delivery, Baltimore, Md.

AMARANTE, FRANCISCO DE PAULA. Native of Sao Paula, Brazil. Last seen when a student at the University of Pennsylvania in Fall of 1915. Left Philadelphia in 1916 for South America.—Address W. H. KESSLER, care of *Adventure.*

BARRINGER, MRS. LAVINIA MAY. (Maiden name Saucia) last heard of in Portland, Ore., July, 1916, where she was working as waitress. Can any one give her whereabouts since then, to her anxious sister, who will send her funds to return home.—Address MRS. FRED. D. LAHEY, No. 12 Dun Street, Plainfield, N. J.

JUDSON, ROBERT A. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, in 1916. Occupation, painter, age 25.—Address Pvt. MAURICE BETTINGER, care of *Adventure.*

MIERISCH, CHARLES L. Last seen in New York City, 1917, 32 years of age. Brown hair and eyes; about 5 ft. 10 in. in height. Any information will be appreciated by his mother, whose health is failing.—Address, MRS. E. MIERISCH, Willow and Carrol Streets, Hillside, L. I.

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WHITTINGTON, EVERETT. Last heard from in Boston, Mass. and Chelsea, Mass., in 1916, occupation, chauffeur, age 25.—Address Pvt. MAURICE BETTINGER, care of *Adventure*.

"SHUN" BOYS of the 213th A. S. Batt. C, E. F. American Legion who were at Camp Borden, Ontario. Write to me of the old bunch, I'd like to hear from you, especially JOE VOGER or GEORGE ZINZLE. Joe, remember Guelph Cent?—Address Pvt. JAMES MORRIS, care of *Adventure*.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

WARD, W. N. Gunner's mate, U. S. S. *Delaware*. Please write your old friend. We met last in Vera Cruz, April, 1914.—Address WM. BROCKWAY, Oriental Park, Marianoo, Cuba.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GILDAY, JOHN E., who was with me through Utah, Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska on the U. P. R. R. last Fall and Winter. Age 21, weight about 145 and height about 5 ft. 7 in. Reward for his address.—Address EDWARD R. HANOVER, 341 West St., New York, U. S. A.

THE following have been inquired for in full, in either the First November, Mid-November or First October issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

CHAFIN, W. R. and Roderic Morrough; Dunkerley, Fred.; Fillingham, Fred L.; Gilday, John E.; Heck, "Hell-Roaring"; Jackson, Charles; Johnson, Harry C.; Laski, Charles or Alexander; Love, Robt.; Manley, Clifford E.; Price, George E.; Redding, Robt. C.; Lagota, Nellie, Annie and Minnie; Shaffer, E. T.; Stillings, George E.; Stinson, William J.; Sullivan, John; Ward, W. N.; White, John S.; Winston, Ernst.

MISCELLANEOUS: Attention Boys of the 213th O. S. C. E. F. American Legion: Brewer, Buchner, "Lizzie" Prouty, "Pop" Caspers, Clarke and numerous others of the Old "Quarantine" squad.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays, Jack P. Robinson, Ray Ozmer, Jimmie Banks, Wu Tien Tang, Christian Bann.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST JANUARY ADVENTURE

Nine other stirring stories, besides the three mentioned in the ad on page 2, will come to you in the First January Number, in your hands on December 3rd:

HOW THE PALIO WAS WON — *By Lucia Mead Priest*
A tale of modern Italy and an old celebration which stirs up the Latin blood.

PARTNERSHIP — *By Harrison R. Howard*
Partnership, like marriage, is sacred—a betrayal of the trust can have but one reward.

THE REAL THING — *By William Hope Hodgson*
Through the storm and the raging sea—apace with death, a mighty steamer fighting flames and waves.

HIGH TRAIL AND HOME TRAIL — *By Charles Tenney Jackson*
A story of the redwood country—and a camp where the orphan asylum man comes for two parentless children.

AN EPISODE IN ORIENTATION — *By Daniel Louis Hanson*
Concerning a valuable belt carried safely through the war zone—almost to the point of delivery.

MURDERERS' CROSS — *By Thomas McMorrow*
A tale of the Southwest—and a blind man stricken on the trail.

BINGO — *By Hapsburg Liebe*
In the Tennessee mountain country you meet him, this queer individual with his singular exclamation—"Bingo!"

GABOREAU THE TERRIBLE. Conclusion — *By Gordon Young*
In the last part of this thrilling story *Everhard* decides to play his whole hand, to penetrate the Castle and meet von Hartmann face to face.

SAGES IN SAGELAND — *By W. C. Tuttle*
While you are planning your Christmas celebration read this latest Tuttle story—perhaps you will get some ideas from the Piperock program.

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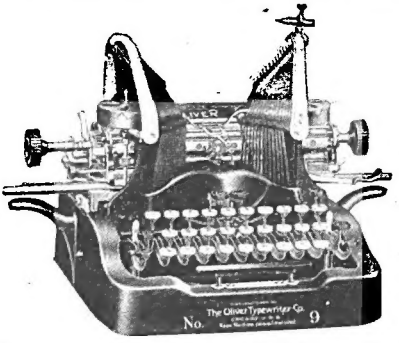

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